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CANADIAN THESES ON MICROFICHE / *THÈSES CANADIENNES SUR MICROFICHE*

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TITLE OF THESIS/*TITRE DE LA THÈSE* A Comparative Study of the Critical Reaction to Faulkner's Work in France and America to 1950.

UNIVERSITY/*UNIVERSITÉ* University of Alberta

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED/ *GRADE POUR LEQUEL CETTE THÈSE FUT PRÉSENTÉE* M.A.

YEAR THIS DEGREE CONFERRED/*ANNÉE D'OBTENTION DE CE GRADE* 1975

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# A Comparative Study of the Critical Reaction to Faulkner's Work in France and America to 1950.

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF M.A.

Department of Comparative Literature

EDMONTON, Alberta

FALL, 1975

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A Comparative Study of the Critical Reaction to Faulkner's Work in France and America to 1950" submitted by Deborah M. Quigg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is an exploration into the divergent critical reactions (1926-1950) of the French and the Americans to Faulkner's work. The American critics generally seem to have found Faulkner's form marred by carelessness, difficulty and obscurity, though a smaller group perceived an evocativeness in Faulkner's form. The French critics tended to be very enthusiastic about Faulkner's experiments with point of view, interior monologue and distortion of chronology. Their enthusiasm was due, in part, to the need for new directions they felt their literary tradition had to take after the exhaustion of the roman d'analyse.

Initially, American critical reaction to the morality behind Faulkner's work was one of outrage; not until the late 1940's was it recognized that Faulkner did have certain ethical concerns within his work. The French critics were never troubled by Faulkner's morality: some found the violence and hatred a symptom of realism, but others perceived it as the outgrowth of Faulkner's puritanism.

An important turning point in the American acceptance of Faulkner's work was a reappraisal of the rôle of the South in his novels. By the late 1940's it was realized that Faulkner was, in part, writing a history or legend of the South. This legend centered around a struggle between the traditional, moral forces and the rising, amoral forces. This realization led to the recognition of philosophical and ethical aspects of Faulkner's work which facilitated his acceptance among American critics.

By 1950, with the Nobel Prize, Faulkner's work was largely accepted and appreciated in both countries, but the Americans had had to overcome a great many prejudices before they found any value in his work. Even after twenty-five years, the basis for acceptance was different in France and in America.

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# INTRODUCTION

This paper is a comparative study of Faulkner's critical reception in France and America up to 1950. The focus of this study is the criticism itself, not Faulkner's work. For the most part, we will let the criticism speak for itself without judging each quotation for its "correctness." We will study the criticism of France and America independently and comparatively.[1] It should be kept in mind that our study will concentrate on the critical reception rather than the popular reaction. Though the popular reaction may well have been very similar to the critical reaction, it should not be assumed that such was the case. It is our hope that this study will reveal 1) certain aspects of Faulkner's work, 2) the early stages of Faulkner criticism in two different countries, and 3) some of the reasons for the divergent French and American reaction.

It has been necessary to limit this discussion to a specific time period of approximately twenty-five years, from about 1926 to 1950. There were a number of reasons for this limitation and the choice of this particular period. The amount of criticism made narrowing the field essential. 1950 was chosen as the cut off because after Faulkner received the Nobel Prize, in that year, he was no longer as controversial in America and, in fact, had become quite respectable. In addition, prior to this date there was relatively little awareness among the American critics about French criticism, nor were the French, with some exceptions, very well informed about the American critical reception.

This period is of particular interest because it is the formative period in Faulkner criticism. Faulkner was still controversial; no consensus had been reached. Though many of the ideas and opinions suggested in this period have subsequently been abandoned, and seem rudimentary, this period definitely sowed the seeds of contemporary Faulkner criticism. As Coindreau says, "So at the time of the Second World War, the main aspects of Faulkner's genius had been, if not completely investigated, at least clearly indicated."[2] Coindreau is speaking here of French criticism, but the same would seem to be true for American criticism.

The amount of criticism and problems of organization have necessitated certain other limitations. We will discuss only certain central areas of Faulkner criticism. Part I will deal with problems of form, both style and narrative technique. Part II will turn to questions of Faulkner's content, specifically the question of the morality of his work and the role of the South in his work. It may be objected that it is not the proper function of the critic to sit in judgement on the morality of a man's work; that it should rather be judged on its aesthetic qualities. However, we are dealing with the existing criticism and the importance of this criticism cannot be underestimated. These two sections are actually quite inclusive of the important elements of Faulkner criticism, but a great deal has been excluded nonetheless. We will particularly avoid questions of interpretation in individual novels.

A final part will attempt to provide some possible explanations for the differences in the French and American reaction. Many suggestions will be entertained, but no firm conclusions will be drawn, as the cultural differences make the question so complex that it is beyond

the scope of this paper to reach final decisions. But in many ways this is the heart of the matter. Rather than a study of Faulkner (though much about Faulkner is contained here), this is a study of the differences between the national reactions. The implication everywhere is, "Why?" Even though no conclusions are reached, we will raise some questions about the basis for reaction and the importance of cultural differences.

Because of the way in which this paper is organized, i.e. by subjects, very little attention will be paid to chronological changes in opinion. Studies on Faulkner in French and American Faulkner criticism have been organized by chronology to emphasize the transitions, but in this comparative study it has proven more desirable to focus the discussion on subjects rather than periods. Only the most radical changes will be noted.

Unfortunately, it has not been within the scope of this paper to study the translations of Faulkner, nor to determine how these translations into French may have affected the critical reception of Faulkner's work in France. Such a study would have been particularly helpful for the first part of this thesis, for undoubtedly the translations did alter the French critics' perception of Faulkner's style and technique in matters of syntax, dialogue, etc. We have relied to some extent on Woodworth's analysis,[3] but his coverage of the question is not complete.

The bibliography has been made as broad as was feasibly possible, but it is by no means definitive. We have tried to cover the famous critics and the unknown, the valuable criticism and the forgotten. We have not limited the bibliography only to the "major" critical works on Faulkner, for that would not have given a broad enough cross-section

for an accurate study. Reviews, articles and book-length studies have been included, though the reviews were chosen in a somewhat random selection and are not by any means complete.[4]

PART I: Form

## CHAPTER ONE: STYLE

One of the problems which will plague this entire study, and which is especially acute for our discussion of style, is the superficiality of much criticism. For every perceptive, analytical insight there are a multitude of comments, made in passing, which offer the critic's opinion, but which throw very little light on the subject.

Virtually every American critic had something to say about Faulkner's style. Style and technique were immediately and violently controversial in Faulkner criticism: both were unusual, difficult, and the critic had to be able to cope with style and technique before he could begin to deal with subject matter. Many were not able to cope. But whether the critic appreciated Faulkner's style or not, the comments are generally extremely superficial. The adjectives used to describe his style seem innumerable, but "obscure," "difficult," "baroque," and the others commonly used, describe the effect of the style, yet fail to analyze the subject critically.

Thus it is, that when our discussion of style is broken into various levels (diction, grammar, sentences, etc.), it appears that there is very nearly a paucity of criticism on the subject, whereas it was an extremely popular starting point for Faulkner criticism.

DICTION:

a) Word Choice

American critics criticized Faulkner for his use of unusual words, particularly words which they felt were archaic or pompous. A reviewer in the Saturday Review referred to this as Faulkner's "fine writing" and he found it a burden.[1] Alfred Kazin, somewhat more colorfully, termed Faulkner's rhetoric a "profligate confusion,"[2] and he, too, objected. Even Malcolm Cowley, who appreciated other of Faulkner's qualities, found the adjectives hard to take:

> All of them [his books] are full of overblown words like "imponderable," "immortal," "immutable," and "immemorial" that he would have used with more discretion, or not at all, if the had followed Hemingway's example...[3]

Cowley specifies how he feels Faulkner's use of language fails:

> Faulkner is always trying to heighten the experience by his use of language, by rhythms, by imagery, and sometimes by hifalutin words that distract our attention from the action.[4]

But Faulkner did have some defenders. Campbell takes issue with Kazin and asserts that Faulkner's use of language is justified by its effect:

> ...he often enriches not only the texture but also the structure of his story by elevating his language to render a situation already charged with emotional intensity.[5]

The French critics did not ever comment on his choice of words extensively, but there are some remarks. Cestre simply notes, "...lorsque l'auteur parle en son nom, son anglais [est] constellé de mots rares ou créés...".[6] Duesberg is less impartial:

> L'extrême verbosité de Faulkner, sa pomposité, son emphase et, brochant sur le tout, son culte de l'effet dramatique provoquent, chez le lecteur moyen, la gêne, sinon l'ennui.[7]

b) Repetition

Faulkner received some harsh criticism for his repeated use of certain words. Conrad Aiken, in one of the first serious studies

of Faulkner's form, had to admit that:

> ...it is easy enough to make fun of Mr. Faulkner's obsessions for particular words, or his indifference and violence to them, or the parrotlike mechanical mytacism (for it is really like a stammer) with which he will go on endlessly repeating such favorites as "myriad, sourceless, impalpable, outrageous, risible, profound"...[8]

Wyndham Lewis felt that these repetitions were symptomatic of the general quality of Faulkner's work, that is, that it "reveals the character of this slipshod and redundant artistic machine."[9]

Warren Beck was one of the rare defenders, and like Campbell, he justifies Faulkner's use of words by its effect. Beck indicates that Faulkner's repetition is a "by-product of his thematic composition," and that the terms he uses over and over "seem to intend adumbration of the tale's whole significance and tone." Beck also notes that the repetitions are more controlled in Faulkner's later work, such as Absalom, Absalom![10]

c) Word Series

Faulkner's use of word series, particularly the use of multiple adjectives, also brought fire from critics. Many critics complained that Faulkner used so many adjectives because he did not have the ability to describe anything forcefully and succinctly. Alfred Kazin is particularly harsh with Faulkner:

> For what one sees always in Faulkner's mountainous rhetoric, with its fantastic pseudo-classical epithets and invertebrate grandeur, its merely verbal intensity and inherent motor violence, is the effort of a writer to impose himself upon that which he cannot create simply and evocatingly. It is the articulation of confusion rather than an evasion of it.... Faulkner's style is a discursive fog...[11]

Against these charges of verbosity and prolixity, Beck replies that, as with the repetition of certain words, Faulkner's word series are not

usually redundant and the cumulative impact is often evocative beyond the words used.[12]

Here again, the French are generally silent, but Claude-Edmonde Magny, in a rare analysis of style, notes that one of Faulkner's stylistic peculiarities is, "...l'usage immodéré des épithètes qualifiantes, généralement au nombre de quatre ou cinq, qui rend si difficile, parfois jusqu'à l'impossibilité, la tâche du traducteur..."[13]

d) Words in Unusual Senses

Again this is of primarily American concern, but there is virtually no agreement: Cushing states that "...except for an occasional impressionistic choice of adjective and adverbs"[14] Faulkner's words retain their conventional meaning. McCole feels that Faulkner uses "certain vivid and original word combinations,"[15] which is an impressive tribute coming from a critic who liked virtually nothing about Faulkner's work. Joseph Warren Beach contends that Faulkner uses pompous and exotic adjectives in unusual senses. They are so twisted by this usage that the meaning is no longer clear. Beach cites such examples as "an ineradicable evening," and "an irrevocable face."[16] Other critics have been harsher and accused Faulkner of using words in such extreme senses, that he could not have understood what they meant.[17]

e) "Lyrical" or Poetic Diction

Critics seem to feel that one of the most striking qualities of Faulkner's diction is its "lyrical" or poetic quality. As Warren Beck says, "What is most individual in his style is its persistent lyrical embroidery and coloring, in extended passages, of the narrative theme."[18]

Here again, most North American criticism is against Faulkner. Malcolm Cowley feels that the imagery distracts from the action,[19] and

Wyndham Lewis indicates that, "'Now it was still, quiet, the fecund earth now coolly suspirant', is as I see it irretrievably second-rate, built out of wordy poetic padding..."[20] The most common criticism is that Faulkner is not sufficiently controlled in his use of poetical or figurative language and that his metaphors and similes are too strained. Beach is one who finds Faulkner's diction too extreme and he cites several examples to support his contention such as "...fills night's globed negation with jonquil thunder."[21] Pelham Edgar feels that, "There is a too perpetual straining for similitudes, since everything is not of necessity like something else."[22] In strikingly similar terms, Harry M. Campbell criticizes Faulkner's diction:

> ...much of Faulkner's poetic diction has an internal weakness in the handling of metaphor. Consider the following characteristic example: "It is as though upon a face carved by a savage caricaturist a monstrous burlesque of all bereavement flowed." ... I ... object to the straining for effect indicated in the adjectives savage and monstrous and other similar words - for example, terrific in "rigid terrific hiatus" - found all too frequently in Faulkner's writing. Even if we grant the validity of the straining, such words are objectionable because from a more technical stand-point, they make no metaphorical effort at all but merely attempt to secure the effect by naming it.[23]

Warren Beck is again practically Faulkner's only American defender. He finds Faulkner's imagery precise, succinct and effective and on his side he cites, "The air, inbreathed, is like spring water."[24]

On this subject there is slightly more French comment. Duesberg is somewhat equivocal in his assessment, but in total it appears that he finds Faulkner's lyrical passages off-set some of the author's other weaknesses. He says, "La magnificence du style, le luxe des images et des métaphores ne constituent ... que d'assez piètres compensations au piétinement épisodique de l'action."[25] In another article, he speaks

of "...le lyrisme de la forme parfois dénaturé en rhétorique et en verbiage..."[26] And later:

> Le jeu savant des assonances et des allitérations, très apparent dans les "zones lyriques," imprime à ce passage une musique sauvage. La prose de Faulkner, comme celle de Rimbaud, est dotée d'une très forte cadence.[27]

Claude-Edmonde Magny clearly admires Faulkner's use of language for its evocative effect:

> ...à cause de cet empâtement du langage par la surabondance des adjectifs nous finissons par <u>voir</u> beaucoup moins distinctement les choses que l'auteur pense pourtant nous décrire, mais par contre nous les <u>sentons</u> mieux.... On comprend que, pour un certain type d'écrivain, les épithètes soient un moyen de camper devant le lecteur les choses de façon magique, de les <u>suggérer</u> beaucoup plus que de les décrire vraiment, bref de les <u>forcer à comparaître</u>, ce qui est le sens strict du mot <u>évoquer</u>.[28]

f) <u>Evocativeness</u>

Magny is not the only critic, so far, to suggest that the critical point about Faulkner's diction is its evocative tone. Though not nearly so articulate, Beck and occasionally Campbell seem to appreciate this quality also. It seems that repetition, multiple adjectives, and figurative language, used to suggest rather than name or describe, are all part of an effort to evoke. Not only does this work at the level of Faulkner's diction, it is true of his sentences, his structure and his narrative technique, as will be shown later. In fact, this would seem to be an underlying philosophy behind Faulkner's work: that is, words are not capable of communicating, hence it is necessary to suggest rather than to describe.

Maurice Coindreau, one of Faulkner's translators, remarked on this in the first article to appear in France on Faulkner, in 1931.[29] Coindreau believes that Addie Bundren's opinion, "that words are no good, that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at"[30]

is also Faulkner's opinion.[31] Thus Faulkner relies on images and symbols. Coindreau's article was quite influential and this subject became a common topic for comment in France. Even in America this quality of Faulkner's work was recognized. In 1936, Bernard DeVoto, who was never completely sympathetic to Faulkner, wrote:

> The simple truth is that Mr. Faulkner is a mystic. He is trying to communicate to us an immediate experience of the ineffable. He cannot tell us because he does not know - because what he perceived cannot be known, cannot therefore be told, can never be put into words but can only be suggested in symbols, whose content and import must forever be in part missed and in greater part misunderstood.[32]

The evocative quality of Faulkner's diction seems to have been recognized by a few on both sides of the Atlantic. Most American critics did not accept it, because the vast majority of them did not find Faulkner's diction to be successful. In fact, nearly all of them complain that Faulkner's language interferes with his ability to successfully convey his stories.

The French have a more serious handicap: the problem of translation. The absence of French comment about Faulkner's style is quite striking, and at least in part, it seems that this must be attributed to subtle changes made in the text when translated from English to French.

Stanley Woodworth feels that Faulkner's personal style and his regionalism are the most difficult qualities to translate.[33] It seems quite likely that unusual words and words in unusual senses would largely be lost in translation. Magny has indicated the difficulty in translating Faulkner's multiple adjectives. After his study of the French translations of Faulkner, Woodworth says that Faulkner's particularly strong vocabulary becomes prosaic and weak in the translations.[34] It is clear that most of the critics who have had anything to say about

Faulkner's style, such as Cestre, Duesberg and Magny, have read Faulkner in English, and though many other critics undoubtedly had access to Faulkner in English, it must be assumed that most reviewers, writers and even academic scholars are reading Faulkner in French.

Thus, in summary, the American critics, with very few exceptions, were not sympathetic to Faulkner's use of language and he was widely criticized for verbosity, strained language, and confusion. Warren Beck is the only critic to give an extensive, sympathetic analysis of Faulkner's style. The French criticism is noticeable largely by its absence, though Magny and a few others did comment, more or less in passing. Even though the quantity is in no way comparable, the French criticism of Faulkner's language is less harsh than the American:

GRAMMAR

All of the comments on Faulkner's grammatical usage are American and negative. Grammar was never as popular a topic as diction, but the critics who commented on Faulkner's grammar, all seem to be irritated by his "errors." Some attribute this unorthodox grammar to ignorance, some to haste and carelessness, and some to "complacent scorn."[35] Joseph Warren Beach feels that Faulkner's errors are simply a matter of negligence, but he finds that these grammatical errors juxtapose strangely with Faulkner's display of erudition. As an example, Beach cites, "He would merely appear at breakfast in a decent and heavy black coat in which he had been married and had worn fifty-two times each year since."[36]

Here again, it would seem that the absence of French criticism can be attributed to the correction of these grammatical irregularities in the French translations.

SENTENCES

Faulkner's sentence structure was a very controversial subject in the early criticism. Here again the American critics are more vocal and more critical than the French. There are basically two aspects to Faulkner's sentences: a complex and involved syntax, and sentences of great length. Both are closely related and the American critics rarely separate the two, so we will deal with them together here.

A noticeably common refrain is that Faulkner's sentences "strangle" themselves. Stephen Vincent Benét says that in The Hamlet, "There are fewer of the long winding sentences that strangle themselves to death in their own subordinate clauses...."[37] And Earle Birney wrote, "Octopus sentences emerge in fine undulating terror and then proceed to strangle themselves in their own streaming tentacles..."[38] Malcolm Cowley is as critical of Faulkner's sentences as he was of his diction:

> The reader is swept along by it [Faulkner's style], but sometimes he gets entangled in it too, as if a river in flood had debouched into a marsh where he flounders among pronouns without visible antecedents and verbs with their subjects on the preceding page. The sentences are inordinately long...[39]

Faulkner's use of parenthesis comes under frequent attack. For example, DeVoto says:

> They [his sentences] have the steady purpose of expressing the inexpressible that accounts for so much of Mr. Faulkner, but they show a style in process of disintegration. When a narrative sentence has to have as many as three parentheses identifying the reference of pronouns, it signifies mere bad writing and can be justified by no psychological or esthetic principle whatever.[40]

McCole is critical, as usual. "[In Absalom, Absalom!] long lines of purely parenthetical expression - in one instance almost a page of them! - obtrude themselves between subject and verbs..."[41]

Fadiman, persistant attacker of Faulkner's work, is critical of the

entire spectrum of Faulkner's syntax:

> To penetrate Mr. Faulkner's sentences is like hacking your way through a jungle. The path closes up at once behind you, and in no time at all you find yourself entangled in a luxuriant mass of modifiers, qualifications, relative clauses, parenthetical phrases, interjected matter, recapitulations, and other indications of a Great Style. All of Mr. Faulkner's shuddery inventions pale in horrendousness before the mere notion of parsing him.[42]

Redman, too, is critical of all aspects of Faulkner's sentences, nor can he find any justification for such a style:

> Mr. Faulkner has a weakness for novelty for its own sake... Too often he displays a perverse liking for syntactical complexity; for a needless, unorganized, and unrewarding complexity.... The disjointed clauses and outrageous parenthesis, the suspended and fractured meanings, are an affront to both eye and ear. Complexity is excusable only when complex ideas require expression, and even then an author's refusal to organize his thought is inexcusable.... It is a deliberate act, not a careless one, of course, it is done for effect, but the effect does not come off and the mess remains.[43]

Conrad Aiken contends that, judged on their effect, Faulkner's sentences are occasionally unsuccessful:

> ...-it is distracting to have to go back and sort out the meaning, track down the structure from clause to clause, then only to find that after all it doesn't much matter, and that the obscurity was perhaps neither subtle nor important. And to the extent that one <u>is</u> annoyed and distracted... Mr. Faulkner has defeated his own ends. One has had, of course, to emerge from the stream, and to step away from it, in order properly to see it; and as Mr. Faulkner works precisely by a process of <u>immersion</u>, of hypnotizing his reader into <u>remaining immersed</u> in his stream, this occasional blunder produces irritation and failure.[44]

In spite of some reservations, Aiken defends Faulkner, for he finds justification for this "overelaborate sentence structure." Out of context they may be "monstrous, but they function within the book itself very effectively."[45] Warren Beck also indicates that criticism of Faulkner's sentences has largely centered on taking one sentence out of context

and abusing Faulkner for it, while ignoring the cumulative effect.[46] Beck finds that Faulkner is guilty of carelessness in his sentence construction, but he nonetheless defends Faulkner:

> In his most characteristic writing Faulkner is trying to render the transcendent life of the mind, the crowded composite of associative and analytical consciousness which expands the vibrant moment into the reaches of all time, simultaneously observing, remembering, interpreting, and modifying the object of its awareness. To this end the sentence as a rhetorical unit (however sustained) is made to hold diverse yet related elements in a sort of saturated solution, which is perhaps the nearest that language as an instrument of fiction can come to the instantaneous complexities of consciousness itself.[47]

Whan also feels that Faulkner's subject matter requires sentences of such complexity. Normal sentences like normal diction, are not sufficient to express what Faulkner is trying to tell us:

> This same compulsion to express and this same knowledge that complete expression will never be attained through normal language channels accounts for the Faulkner sentence-crystals that grow by an inner discipline.[48]

Joseph Warren Beach, too, finds Faulkner's long sentences justified because they accomplish "a sense of the crowding fury of experience, its overwhelming volume and complexity."[49]

Taking a refreshing paradoxical approach, Cushing defends Faulkner by denying that Faulkner experiments with syntax at all and contending that he uses simple sentence structure.[50]

The complexity and length of Faulkner's sentences is occasionally remarked upon in French criticism, but again these comments are usually made in passing. Magny speaks of "...la longeur des phrases et des incidents qui passe toute mesure (comparés à Faulkner, Proust et Charles du Bos sont des auteurs au souffle bref)..."[51] And Anne-Marie Soulac remarks on "...cette confusion et ... cette verbosité volontaires, qui naissent si souvent de l'inspiration luxuriante de Faulkner..."[52]

Cestre recognizes that Faulkner uses "modes syntactiques personnels et surprenants."[53]

Here again, there is much less French criticism than American. Some French critics do recognize the complexity and length of Faulkner's sentences, but these critics have all probably read Faulkner in English. For the reader of Faulkner in translation, Woodworth indicates that, though the length of the sentences are generally retained in French, the syntax is usually "corrected" to be logical and clear.[54]

Another striking quality about the French commentary is the lack of value judgement. Soulac implies that the length of Faulkner's sentences is necessitated by what he has to say, but most critics only comment on the length in passing.

The Americans, on the other hand, seem incapable of remarking on anything without expressing an opinion. Most are not happy with Faulkner's sentences; as with the diction, the sentences seem to be so ornate that they almost prevent the reader from reading the novel. But there are some defenders: Conrad Aiken contends that, except for occasional blunders, Faulkner's sentences succeed in hypnotizing the reader and carrying him along. Others suggest that such complex sentences reflect Faulkner's view of the world. Whan and Beck indicate that it is the intangible quality of Faulkner's subject which requires such elaborate, layered sentences. And Beach finds that they reflect the complex crowding of experience.

INDIVIDUALIZED AND COLLOQUIAL SPEECH

There is one area of Faulkner's style which met with almost universal approval, for a change, and that was Faulkner's use of colloquial speech and the differentiation of characters through their speech in dialogue

or monologue. Beck contends that Faulkner's use of colloquial dialogue and narration "is unsurpassed in contemporary American fiction." He also notes that dialogue is individualized in such books as Sanctuary and that often the rough colloquial speech is sharply juxtaposed with the seriousness of the subject matter.[55] Oscar Cargill was particularly impressed with the handling of colloquial narrative in Jason's section of The Sound and the Fury.[56] Sterling Brown in The Negro in American Fiction states that "Faulkner records Negro speech with complete accuracy...."[57] Henry Campbell is particularly flattering: he feels that Faulkner has the ability, "like a metaphysical poet, to juxtapose poetic eloquence and the realistic idiom of homely speech."[58]

As Woodworth indicated, this regional quality is virtually impossible to translate and in fact no attempt was made to convey a southern American quality in the speech of Faulkner's characters when his novels were translated. Instead rural, French dialects were used. Thus, one cannot expect very much French commentary. Cestre, however, notes that, "Le patois, dont se servent les personnages, a une saveur âpre..." and he remarks that his contrasts with the author's use of archaic words.[59]

Again we have relatively little French comment, but surprisingly favorable American criticism. Not only do the critics like Faulkner's use of dialect and colloquial speech, they seem to appreciate the way this speech is juxtaposed to Faulkner's lyrical passages and the serious content of his novels.

CUMULATIVE IMPRESSION

There are really very few serious studies of Faulkner's style dating from this early period and even the number of brief critical appraisals of the various aspects of his style is slight. Yet very

few American critics who wrote on Faulkner did not have something to say about his style. Most of these comments are superficial and sweeping: they do not specify what they are referring to when they speak of style, but they are always eager to offer an opinion. Most critics are really only concerned with the cumulative impression which Faulkner's style makes on them. Virtually all of these remarks focus in some way on the difficulty and complexity which impressed most readers immediately. Basically, there seem to be five impressions: Faulkner's style is characterized by its: a) haste, b) lack of control, c) difficulty and obscurity, d) suggestiveness and evocativeness, and e) hypnotic quality.

a) Haste

The American critics were forever using Faulkner's own statements about his work against him. One such statement was that he "wrote As I Lay Dying in six weeks, without changing a word."[60] This appeared in the preface to As I Lay Dying and many critics, far from disbelieving the statement, felt that Faulkner really should not boast about such haste. Oscar Cargill cites this quotation and concludes, "...As I Lay Dying (1930), is but poorly executed. In it there are signs of haste and of fatigue."[61] Delmore Schwartz also finds Faulkner's style careless, particularly his choice of extravagant words:

> The carelessness suggests itself as that of an author who is in an immense hurry (impatience is a form of laziness, said Kafka) and who writes his books quickly, driving ahead without looking back at the previous pages.[62]

And Frohock, who generally admires Faulkner's writing, makes a quite similar comment:

> It is unnecessary to point out the places, in Sanctuary for instance, when he sounds like someone who has just

> made the welcome discovery of his ability to write, and is too maddened by his own perfume to be willing to take the time to reread himself.[63]

b) Lack of Control and Restraint

Similar criticism was made that Faulkner's work is not sufficiently mature to be controlled and restrained. Many of these critics felt that Faulkner's "lack of taste" was reflected in his subject matter as well as his style.[64] Some critics who remark on this, preface their criticism by admitting Faulkner's great talent, yet regretting this defect. Boyd makes such a comment:

> Mr. Faulkner submits to very little government in writing. His impressionistic manner is honest but slap-dash; often he sets down an extraordinarily vivid scene. The book [Soldier's Pay] has fervor and strength, but it would be more effective if it were better controlled.[65]

And Snell says, "It is this quality of excess which is Faulkner's chief defect; in every novel we feel the strain and stress of a prodigious talent over exerting itself."[66]

Delmore Schwartz seems to feel that this lack of control interferes with the telling of the story:

> This vision of Life is delivered to the page by a variety of devices appropriate in their sum, but not always under the author's control, and often directed as much against the reader as upon the story to be told.[67]

Cowley, too, regrets this quality, but seem to feel that Faulkner is not capable of writing any other way:

> But the partial failure of Absalom, Absalom! is chiefly explained by the style in which his daemon forced him to write it - a strained involved, ecstatic style in which colloquialisms and deliberate grammatical errors are mingled with words too pretentious even for Henry James.[68]

Cestre makes the sole French comment, which does not really differ very much from American criticism. "Un peu plus de maturité, un plus

grand souci d'art, et il semble que l'oeuvre ne tardera pas à s'épanouir en beauté."[69]

c) Difficulty and Obscurity

It would be safe to say that virtually everyone agreed that Faulkner's style is at times difficult, and even that his difficulty results in a certain obscurity. The point of disagreement lies in whether or not this is justified. A number of comments were made suggesting that Faulkner is obscure only part of the time - he can be very precise as well. An anonymous reviewer asks "What manner of man is this who can use incoherence so effectively on one page and on the next write a most beautifully single-minded narrative?"[70] And Horace Gregory comments:

> If Faulkner's extraordinary rhetoric is at times obscure, and is at times as baroque as the plot and substance of some of his stories, he has also written more passages of unmistakable lucidity than any other writer of his generation.[71]

Many critics were extremely impatient with the difficulty of Faulkner's style. Aiken and others acknowledged that Faulkner does not make his material easily "perceptible" or accessible,[72] and some critics found this quality perverse and irritating. On this subject, however, there is some surprisingly thoughtful American criticism. The relationship between what Faulkner was trying to say and how he said it was quite widely recognized. Schwartz perceives this, but concludes that Faulkner's style is still not warranted:

> It is plain enough that there is a connection between a mystification of style - a deliberate effort to make the story difficult to apprehend and a vision of Life's irrationality. That such a literary method is justified by such a vision is not plain.[73]

Breit, on the other hand, does find justification in Faulkner's style:

> This [difficult style], I believe, is the way of the poet, of making language act creatively, and perhaps Faulkner should be read as a poet. But this "plunge into the baroque," one must admit, is a difficulty. And yet not such a difficulty as to prove fruitless. For the patient and trusting reader there are astonishing rewards...[74]

Conrad Aiken and Warren Beck are particularly perceptive in their insights. Aiken notes:

> They [his sentences] parallel in a curious and perhaps inevitable way, and not without aesthetic justification, the whole elaborate method of <u>deliberately withheld meaning</u>, of progressive and partial and delayed disclosure, which so often gives the characteristic shape to the novels themselves.[75]

Beck feels that Faulkner's style reflects the "complex, mysterious, obscure, and incomplete" quality of the reality he conveys.[76]

The French criticism, though sparse, is again favorable. Arland seems most anxious to defend Faulkner from his attackers:

> On lui reprochera sans doute d'être parfois confus et d'ajouter du mystère, soit dans la hâte de la composition, soit par un éclairage artificiel, à ce qui, en soi, était suffisamment secret. On peut d'abord être déconcerté, croire à un procédé, souhaiter une lumière franche. Mais le procédé ne tarde pas à paraître un besoin, et l'allure chaotique du roman un de ses charmes. Tout reproche doit enfin céder la place devant le jaillissement de cette oeuvre.[77]

d) <u>Evocativeness and Suggestiveness</u>

The evocative and suggestive quality has already been mentioned at some length. Simply to recapitulate, Beck and Magny commented on the evocative quality of Faulkner's use of language and Beck, Whan and Beach recognized similar qualities in his sentence structure. Working on many levels, these critics perceived that the rich, superabundance of Faulkner's style is necessary to convey his meaning which goes beyond the simple articulated level.

e) <u>Hypnotic Quality</u>

The same aspects of Faulkner's style which convey an evocativeness and suggestiveness are perceived by other critics as hypnotic. Conrad Aiken gives quite a complete explanation of this quality:

> What Mr. Faulkner is after, in a sense, is a continuum. He wants a medium without stops or pauses, a medium which is always of the moment, and of which the passage from moment to moment is as fluid and undetectable as in the life itself which he is purporting to give...; the reader must therefore be steadily drawn in; he must be powerfully and unremittingly hypnotized inward and downward to that image-stream; and this suggests, perhaps, a reason not only for the length and elaborateness of the sentence structure, but for the repetitiveness as well.[78]

Though some American critics recognized this quality, this topic is heavily dominated by the French, for a change. Malraux in his early and influential preface to Sanctuary, noted the quality of obsession in Faulkner's works, and subsequently verbal intensity, which pulls the reader in, became a common topic for comment in French criticism. Speaking about this, Claude-Edmonde Magny describes the process:

> ...comme l'a dit Malraux dans sa préface à Sanctuaire, il incorpore son obsession particulière à la trame même de l'univers et cherche ainsi à s'en délivrer en la projetant dans l'objet - et, ajouterais-je, en nous forçant à la partager.[79]

Previously Magny says of Faulkner's style, "...sa façon de conter étant par essence enveloppée, implicative, au lieu d'être développante et discursive."[80] Most common are comments about the author's control over the reader - the way in which he seems to pull the reader in. Cestre says:

> [Faulkner]...nous entraîne comme dans une forêt équatoriale ou de splendides broussailles se dressent à chaque pas. Devant cet écrivain, nous nous sentons en présence d'une force débordante, encore mal domptée, qui nous étonne et nous subjugue à la fois.[81]

Soulac and Dabit both make similar comments:

> On ne peut pas parler de la facilité, de la redondance, de la trivialité de son style; ce sont des mots qui, appliqués à lui, perdent toute signification. On ne saurait reprocher à la mer d'être faite de trop de gouttes d'eau! Comme une marée irrésistible, son verbe nous entraîne, tirant de ses abîmes vague après vague pour nous rouler vers le monde solide du rivage, puis nous entraîner dans son sein avant que nous ayons pu reprendre pied.[82]

> Impossible, du reste, de se poser toutes ces questions lorsqu'on est plongé dans ce livre [Sanctuaire]. Les problèmes ne comptent plus, l'art de William Faulkner se laisse oublier. On est envoûté et seulement sensible à l'action du roman, curieux d'en decouvrir mieux les personnages, profondément troublé par la figure de Popeye.[83]

In conclusion, most of the criticism of Faulkner's style before 1950 was quite superficial, yet certain critics had pin-pointed key aspects in his style. The bulk of the criticism was American; aside from certain critics, such as Warren Beck, who gave Faulkner serious and sympathetic consideration, most of this American criticism was unfavorable. The most noticeable exception to this was the widespread appreciation of Faulkner's use of dialogue and colloquial speech. The absence of much French criticism was due, at least in part, to alterations made in translation. The extent and importance of these changes should not be under-estimated. As Woodworth says:

> On peut constater que, en général, les traducteurs, parce qu'ils sont Français et que le français est une langue logique, ont tendance à corriger et à preciser des pages qui, en anglais, avaient été voulues vagues, embrouillées, même incorrectes.[84]

## CHAPTER TWO: NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

### EXPERIMENTATION IN FAULKNER'S WORK

> Although Faulkner's critics are frequently at variance on many issues, they all concur on one point - that his narrative technique is extremely intricate and perplexing. Having agreed upon this, however, they divide into two groups: those who feel that this complexity is justified and those who hold that it is an unnecessary obstacle.[1]

Lawrence Bowling has summarized the situation very succinctly in his analysis, quoted above. The complexity of Faulkner's writing lies largely in its innovative qualities; his use of interior monologue, distorted chronology, and similar techniques was made even more difficult, it would seem, because these techniques were new and unfamiliar to the critics. This reaction is quite similar to the critical reaction to Faulkner's style: some found the difficulties worthwhile and fruitful, but most found the complexity a burden and an obstacle.

Cushing is one who expresses sympathy with Faulkner's innovative technique. Referring to These 13, he says:

> The materials of Mr. Faulkner's tales, the ideas that have gone into them, are often commonplace, often trivial, but in their presentation their author has displayed considerable ingenuity, exploring along many lines the possibilities of narrative technique, employing to this end a wide variety of methods.[2]

Alfred Kazin, too, admires Faulkner's experimental technique. He feels that Faulkner's technique and form "has earned him a place among the great experimentalists in the novel and even in poetry." Kazin undercuts his compliment by assuming that Faulkner's narrative technique was really the manifestation of neurosis and that he could not have written other

than he did. Kazin specifies this by saying that Faulkner's experimentation was the expression of a "psychological tie, a need to invest everything he wrote with a wild, exhilarated, and disproportionate intensity...."[3]

Kakin's is one of the most favorable comments which can be found. Many other critics find that the technique is not justified - the experiment has gone too far. McCole speaks of Faulkner's form as "a technique which is, if anything, too experimental. His stream-of-consciousness upon such occasions turns into a seething whirlpool of eccentricities...."[4] A.C. Ward also finds Faulkner's experiments unsuccessful and he concludes:

> ...however much we wish for reasonable freedom for the novelist in choice of subject and method, there must be limits of sanity beyond which literary experimentation can hope to produce only pathological documents with no significance as works of art.[5]

Campbell finds As I Lay Dying to be an unsuccessful experiment. He says, "This experimental structure is little more than a light framework hastily thrown together to justify the unmotivated Tourneurian eloquence."[6]

As with style, a number of critics give some qualified approval for Faulkner's experiments, but hope to see an evolution of his technique toward a more mature and successful form. H.M. Campbell makes such a comment:

> Faulkner has attempted the very difficult combination of these two methods [action and connected plot with realistic exploration of mental drama]...and at his best he has made considerable progress in that direction. But he has not yet evolved a sure feeling for form out of his varied experiments. If he overcomes this difficulty, he will, in spite of his limited subject matter, produce works that will be major classics in our literature.[7]

The French, rather than hoping for evolution, felt that they could perceive this process in Faulkner's work and they were generally pleased with the direction he took. Le Breton begins by saying, "Ses

expériences ne sont pas toutes des réussites, loin de là." But this has not been disastrous in Le Breton's opinion:

> ...il y a des échecs heureux qui forcent l'écrivain à y voir plus clair en lui-même, à se discipliner, à distinguer les audaces acceptables des expériences dangereuses. L'insuccès de William Faulkner est de ceux-là. Esprit curieux, tempérament d'expérimentateur, il avait des idées intéressantes et personnelles sur la technique du roman.[8]

Le Breton feels that this process is entirely worthwhile, for ultimately Faulkner is able to consolidate his best in Absalom, Absalom! "La technique subtile et vivante d'Absalom est l'aboutissant de ces longues années de recherche obstinée. Dans ce roman, Faulkner est entièrement et magnifiquement lui-même."[9]

Jean-Paul Sartre also sees an evolution in Faulkner's work, but he feels the turning point came at an earlier period: he finds that the crucial transition is between Sartoris and The Sound and The Fury.[10] It would seem that Sartre finds the more experimental works of Faulkner's the most satisfying. This is not universally true among the French, however. Charly Guyot, for example, takes exception to Sartre's view:

> Dans une étude remarquable, Sartre prétend que Faulkner écrivant Sartoris n'était pas encore en pleine possession de sa technique. Je ne suis pas sûr qu'il faille retenir cette affirmation. Sartoris est de la même année que Le Bruit et la Fureur. Si l'auteur, dans cette dernière oeuvre, applique des procédés audacieusement nouveaux, ce n'est pas, je crois, qu'il juge désormais inopérants ceux - plus traditionnels - dont il venait d'user dans Sartoris. La preuve c'est que d'autres romans, bientôt - Sanctuaire, par exemple, Lumière d'août - n'exigeront pas l'emploi d'une technique aussi savante que Le Bruit et la Fureur. Il me semble que ce livre difficile, et qui reste déconcertant, garde, en une certaine mesure, le caractère d'un exercice.[11]

From this very brief examination of the critic's reactions, it would seem that the Americans were, again, more critical than the French. However, in the works of an author who experimented as much as Faulkner did, nearly every critic can be expected to have reservations about

something Faulkner tried, and clearly the French as well as the Americans do have their reservations about certain periods or aspects of Faulkner's work.

We will take a closer look at various aspects of Faulkner's narrative technique. Though we will not analyze every facet, we will look particularly at the more experimental components of his technique. It should be kept in mind, however, that it is somewhat misleading to speak of Faulkner's "narrative technique" as if he had a pat formula which he used in every novel. From 1926 to 1950, his work undergoes quite dramatic changes, and even in the novels he wrote between 1929 and 1931 (Sanctuary, The Sound and The Fury and As I Lay Dying) the experimentation and variety is considerable. However, each noteworthy experiment received a good deal of press coverage and, even in novels which seem quite different, certain trends can be found.

POINT OF VIEW

a) Multiple Perspectives

One narrative technique which Faulkner uses in some of his major novels is that of multiple viewpoints or perspectives. The Sound and The Fury, As I Lay Dying and Absalom, Absalom! are the most prominent examples. In these novels, rather than using more conventional methods of exposition, such as omniscient narration, or dramatic dialogue, Faulkner has chosen to reveal some central subject matter though the minds of three or more characters. Each sheds a slightly different light on the subject matter though the medium of dialogue (in Absalom, Absalom!) or interior monologue (in As I Lay Daying and the first three sections of The Sound and The Fury).

This technique of multiple perspectives, by itself, was not new or

experimental with Faulkner. In fact, many critics feel that this method recalls Henry James. Olga Westland Vickery, for instance, says:

> The Sound and the Fury seems to employ the technique diagramed by Henry James in "the neat figure of a circle consisting of a number of small rounds disposed at equal distances about a central object."[12]

Oscar Cargill is also reminded of James, but find that Faulkner's use is not as successful as James' because the action is not made clearer by the use of this technique.[13]

There are a number of critics, like Mr. Cargill, who find the technique unsuccessful because of the complexity it entails. However, most of the American criticism is thoughtful and sympathetic. Conrad Aiken says that in Faulkner's best novels, "...the effect of richness and complexity is chiefly obtained by a very skillful fugue-like alternation of viewpoint."[14] Frohock finds that this complexity is a mixed blessing. He contends that the reader finds out much more because the central concern is seen from many angles. As he says:

> Here we have one of the great advantages of Faulkner's optics. The corresponding disadvantage is that to understand what he is reading the reader has to wait an inordinately long time for the information he really needs.[15]

Robert Penn Warren notes that this method of narration influences Faulkner's method of character development: rather than providing insight into a character through development, he uses revelation.

> A character, Sutpen, for instance, may appear in various perspectives, so that from book to book we move toward a final definition much as in actual life we move toward the definition of a person.[16]

Whan takes a different approach, but agrees that the quality of multiple perspective gives Faulkner's work a richeness it would lack otherwise:

> This attempt to create depth by piling layer upon layer [in language] parallels Faulkner's multiple viewpoint

> technique or stereoscopic structure. The ultimate effect of this compulsion to narrate and this fury at not communicating is wonder or awe; something strange, something beyond common speech has occurred.[17]

Thus the same saturation which occurred at the level of diction is also working at the level of narrative technique.

There seems to be agreement that As I Lay Dying is Faulkner's most complex experiment in multiple viewpoint, but there is not complete agreement about its relative success. Vickery finds that each of the characters reveal themselves on four levels in As I Lay Dying, "action, words, conscious thought, and the unconscious."[18] Though this is the same technique used in The Sound that the Fury, here it is more complex. Snell agrees, but does not find it to Faulkner's advantage:

> ...As I Lay Dying, using a similar method, i.e., achieving its narrative progression through revelations of a varied set of points of view, is less successful because, unlike The Sound and the Fury, in which the method is to deal with one character's revelations at a time, and once only, it deals with them piecemeal and alternately among all the characters throughout the book. The method, at best, is artificial and tends to destroy verisimilitude;...[19]

As always, there were some critics who found no redeeming value at all in this technique, and, predictably, C.J. McCole was among those critics:

> That this technique [of multiple perspective] secures its desired effects can hardly be denied. Its effect upon a reader is that not only of watching a succession of neurotics slinking along in a nightmare of horrors, but also of seeing those figures reflected back, as it were, in a whole series of mirrors which magnify their degeneracies.[20]

The extremely moralistic quality of McCole's criticism cannot be ignored. It pervades all of his comments and the comments of a certain faction in American criticism. This quality will be discussed later.

The French do not seem to have been particularly interested in

this aspect of Faulkner's use of perspective. Several, like Coindreau refer to it in passing, but do not find it controversial. Maurice Coindreau describes the technique used in Absalom, Absalom!:

> William Faulkner, qui répugne aux récits directs, se sert cette fois-ci, d'un miroir à trois faces pour développer son récit: les trois interlocuteurs de Quentin Compson: Miss Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson (père de Quentin) et Shrevelin McCannon, son camarade à l'université de Harvard.[21]

b) The Choric Figure

Another, quite different, point of view found in Faulkner's work is that of a choric figure. The choric figure is found in a number of novels, most of which do not use multiple perspective. Examples depend somewhat on the critic's definition, but often cited are: Dilsey (in The Sound and the Fury), the reporter (in Pylon), Horace Benbow (in Sanctuary), Quentin (in Absalom, Absalom!), and Ratliff (in The Hamlet).

Vickery speaks of this role as a "disinterested spectator"[22] which differs considerably from Warren Beck's definition as a "compassionate, troubled observer."[23] Schwartz simply uses the term "Choric characters."[24] Beck finds the point of view which these figures provide quite important:

> It is no doubt significant of Faulkner's own attitude that these compassionate observers so largely provide the reflective point of view from which the story is told and thereby determine its moral atmosphere.[25]

But it is the French who give the greatest attention to this matter. Here the most common term is témoin. Mayoux's reaction to the tone established by these witnesses is altogether different from Warren Beck's. Mayoux contends, "Cette futilité, nous la trouvons constamment représentée par un certain nombre de personnages de Faulkner qui sont en quelque sorte des témoins...."[26] Claude-Edmonde Magny and Jean Pouillon analyze the role of this figure in considerable depth.

Magny summarizes this technique:

> Le plus commun [des procédés] consiste à faire reconstituer l'ordre réel des événements - c'est-à-dire conter l'histoire - par un spectateur du drame qui, d'abord extérieur et indifférent, se prend vite au jeu et au bout de quelques pages se trouve lui aussi impliqué dans ces affaires qui ne le concernent nullement.[27]

Magny specifically cites Horace Benbow, the reporter, and Quentin and Shreve as sucked in, in this way. She finds this narrative technique much simpler for the reader than the multiple visions of As I Lay Dying, "ce qui est peut-être trop exiger du lecteur."[28] In addition to this greater accessibility, Magny has other reasons for finding this technique significant. "Et si la position du 'témoin engagé' a tant d'importance dans ses romans, c'est que telle est aussi, très précisément, la situation du lecteur des susdits romans."[29] Thus the témoin is essential to create a sense of identification on the part of the reader and to reveal the seemingly obscure concerns of the author:

> On pourrait...dire que toute oeuvre romanesque pleinement réussie tire son efficace de cette identification qu'elle parvient à réaliser entre l'écrivain et son lecteur par l'intermédiaire des personnages du récit...
>
> Il faut de plus noter que chez Faulkner le Témoin ne reste jamais longtemps neutre, ni indifférent - à la différence de ce qui a lieu, par exemple, chez Henry James, dont l'art pourrait bien souvent être qualifié d'art de "voyeur". Je verrais volontiers dans cet homme peu à peu envoûté que l'écrivain interpose entre nous, lecteur, et sa création, comme un intermédiaire - et, pour tout dire, un Médiateur - auquel nous nous identifions, à mesure que, le récit progressant, notre vision coïncide davantage avec la sienne, et qui graduellement nous introduit, par d'insensibles transitions, au coeur même de cet univers personnel de l'auteur dont on pouvait craindre, au début, qu'il ne demeurât irrémédiablement incommunicable.[30]

Jean Pouillon's approach is altogether different. He proceeds rather by inquiring into Faulkner's psychological reasons for using this narrative technique:

> Il [le reporter dans Pylône] est l'indispensable témoin sans lequel rien n'existe comme histoire. C'est donc de

> son point de vue que les événements peuvent être racontés. Pour Faulkner, il n'en est pas d'autre, puisque, dans Pylône, comme dans tous ses romans, il a récusé le point de vue du Dieu qui saurait de ses créatures ce qu'elles ignorent elles-mêmes.
>
> Cette nécessité d'un témoin (on en retrouve dans tous les romans de Faulkner) se lie d'ailleurs dans Pylône à ce qu'il y a de romanesque - au sens ordinaire du mot dans l'intrigue. Ce qui pousse le reporter à se faire ainsi le témoin du trio, c'est son amour pour la femme. Mais il ne demande rien de plus que de la suivre et de la voir. Certaines de ses fantaisies imaginatives sont même assez claires pour qu'on dise de cet amour que c'est un désir de voyeur. Ainsi, le contenu du roman et sa technique s'accordent parfaitement: la présence du reporter, qu'exige la technique, se trouve justifiée par le désir qu'on lui prête - le désir fait qu'il y a quelque chose à raconter; cette presence fait qu'on peut le raconter. Cette convergence satisfait enfin le puritanisme de Faulkner - auteur fasciné par ce qu'il réprouve - et son goût d'écrire. Ce ne sont pas là en effet deux attitudes contradictoires, dont l'une pousserait Faulkner à écrire et dont l'autre l'en éloignerait: la réprobation est inséparable de la fascination et est avec elle la condition même du roman. Faulkner écrivant n'est autre que le reporter qui se délecte et se torture à imaginer les deux hommes se succédant auprès de la femme qu'il aime.[31]

Faulkner's various viewpoints, whether multiple or represented by a choric figure, are clearly recognized on both sides of the Atlantic. This is an area which should be effected little or not at all by the process of translation. What is striking, and seemingly inexplicable, is the proponderance of American interest in Faulkner's use of multiple perspective, while the French devote themselves almost wholly to the choric figure. There is no apparent explanation for this beyond the fact that once discussion arises in criticism, other critics will pursue the same topic. As there was little awareness of criticism on the opposite side of the ocean, discussion remained channelled, in both cases, in its original direction.

INTERIOR MONOLOGUE

Often those novels of Faulkner's which use multiple viewpoints also

use interior monologue. Here, we are speaking almost entirely of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, and in both cases the technique is very experimental. Joyce's name is often mentioned as an influence in Faulkner's use of interior monologue, but both French and American critics agree that Faulkner has alterred this narrative technique to suit his own purposes.

Faulkner's use of interior monologue is a very "impressionistic" technique. Faulkner uses his characters to record external events and their impression of these events. Frohock speaks of Faulkner's characters as "vast recording machines of impression," and he finds that the immediacy of consciousness and sensation allows little time for interpretation.[32] P.M. Jack would seem to disagree, in part, for he says, about The Wild Palms, "To Conrad's impressionism of an event is added Henry James's minute analysis of the circumstances."[33] Larbaud's comment on Faulkner's impressionism in some ways resembles Frohock's:

> Du reste le traitement de cette forme par M. William Faulkner lui est assez personnelle: il suggère l'image d'une machine à lire et à projeter la pensée, d'une sorte de réflecteur, qui le romancier braquerait sur chacun de ses personnages à tour de rôle.[34]

The extent of the impressionism varies greatly from novel to novel and from character to character, but perhaps Benjy's section of The Sound and the Fury represents the epitome of this quality. Bowling finds it quite admirable.

> All his [Benjy's] mind does is reproduce what it takes in through the physical senses. His section of the book is probably the most thoroughgoing sustained effort in impressionistic writing in all literature.[35]

Most of the favorable criticism about Faulkner's use of interior monologue centers on the rationale for using such a technique. Bowling

feels that the use of interior monologue has serious consequences for the novel, because it "tends to break down three stabilizing elements traditionally considered fundamental in narrative fiction: exposition, plot and chronological order."[36] But in spite of these risks, Bowling admires Faulkner's use of interior monologue. He finds that the style of Benjy's section is very appropriate: simple words, repetition, simple sentences, reduction of punctuation and the absence of abstract thought or explanation implies "an undiscriminating mind."[37] He also finds that Benjy's section is an appropriate beginning for the entire novel:

> The Sound and the Fury is a novel about disorder, disintegration, and the absence of perspective. As an introduction to this theme, what could be more appropriate than the flat, perspectiveless language of Benjy's section? The novel is essentially about the internal chaos of the characters - their intellectual, moral, and spiritual confusion.[38]

Jean Simon finds interior monologue an excellent technique for exposing characters and he, too, finds Benjy's section exceptional:

> Faulkner use abondamment du monologue intérieur, incohérent et illogique, mais qui, mieux que le langage formulé, révèlera le fond des coeurs. Son tour de force le plus prestigieux est sans doute d'avoir transposé les états d'âmes de Benjy, idiot et sourd-muet, et de nous avoir fait pénétrer dans cette vie élémentaire.[39]

Harlan Hatcher feels that interior monologue is a technique well suited to probing the feeble minds of Faulkner's characters, which implies that he, too, is thinking of Benjy's section, as well some others.[40] Baiwir contends that the form is appropriate, not because Faulkner's characters are idiots, but because they are uneducated and inarticulate:

> L'emploi de cette méthode se justifie d'autant mieux que la plupart du temps, les héros sont des paysans ignorants, sournois, incapables de s'exprimer parfaitement par la parole, et rendue plus farouches encore par le sentiment d'isolement issu de cette impuissance.[41]

Le Breton suggests that this narrative technique recommends itself particularly because it is closer to reality:

> A la suite de James Joyce et de Virginia Woolf, il pensait qu'il était possible au romancier de serrer de plus près la réalité psychologique, mais il voulait aller plus loin que ces écrivains.... Ainsi, les parcelles isolées dont est faite la réalité, saisies et colorées par ses consciences diverses...avec ces éléments encore vivants, il se construirait une réalité complexe, confuse sans doute, mais plus proche de la vie.[42]

Le Breton also feels that interior monologue permits more intimate contact between the reader and the character because the revelations are so personal, and it also increases identification between the reader and the events because these events are perceived through the psychology of the characters and must be reconstructed by the reader. In this way the reader vicariously experiences the events himself. For example, he says:

> Tantôt celui qui parle décrit ce qu'il voit en le commentant, tantôt nous avons simplement le défilé du courant de conscience, sensations actuelles et réminiscences alternant sans barrières artificielles. Nous assistons ainsi aux réactions psychologiques secrètes d'une quinzaine de personnes mêlées de près ou de loin aux événements dont nous suivons le déroulement à travers leurs diverses personnalités: tantôt nous en avons la perception directe quand il y a récit; le plus souvent, nous ne percevons que les résonances de ces événements dans les consciences, à travers les allusions lourdes de sentiments qui nous parviennent.[43]

Jean Pouillon feels that Faulkner uses interior monologue because he wants both the author, himself, and the reader to be "avec" his characters. That is, he does not want to convey any omniscient knowledge about his characters so that the reader knows no more than the character.[44] Pouillon also sees Faulkner's reality as highly subjective and the interior monologue is best suited to convey this subjective reality. A number of critics contend that Faulkner explores and analyzes the soul or subcons-

ciousness of his character with this narrative technique, but Pouillon denies this.[45]

Chastel finds this technique difficult, but worthwhile for the intimacy the reader achieves with the characters:

> Avec Faulkner [dans Le Bruit et la fureur] il n'y a plus que le monologue du moi, il n'y a plus de relations externes, tout est situé dans la conscience et dans son murmure incessant....l'anecdote...se dessine peu à peu, l'ensemble se compose comme au hasard, par l'addition des traits, des rappels qui traversent la conscience et la sensibilité de chacun. C'est par là que Faulkner justifie sa reputation d'auteur difficile: on partage avec lui le secret d'êtres singuliers et barbares; on se mêle à leur substance même, en adoptant leur langage elliptique, violent et rapide.[46]

A certain group of critics also felt that interior monologue was part of Faulkner's solution to the problem of inarticulateness. James Burnham feels this is a critical point:

> The most central intuition in Faulkner, that from which arise all the most deeply emotional situations, is a feeling toward inarticulateness. Other writers of course have emphasized the inability of words to communicate, the inadequacy of all verbal expression of emotional complexities. But I know no other writer whose work may in a very real sense be said to grow from the passionate awareness of inarticulateness. The most obvious example is the idiot Benjy....[47]

Nor were the French insensitive to this quality. Claude-Edmonde Magny compares the techniques of a movie and Benjy's section in The Sound and the Fury:

> ...dans les deux cas il s'agit de nous introduire dans un univers de folie, incommunicable par un récit logique, dont le désordre ne peut nous être restitué que par une implacable fidélité à la perception, si incohérente soit-elle, du personnage qui vit dans cet univers.[48]

Le Breton takes a somewhat different approach:

> ...il y a une ou deux idées dont Faulkner par la suite tirera le plus grand profit: l'idée, d'abord, que notre pensée intime, primitive, ignore les mots qui ne sont utiles que du moment où l'intelligence s'empare du contenu brut de la conscience et en fait quelque chose

> d'articulé: les mots, donc, resteront, pour les plus primitifs de ses personnages qui affleurent à peine au seuil de l'intelligence, des signes interchangeables dont ils se passent volontiers. Ces personnages ont toute une langue à eux, le langage des regards, des bruits de la nature, des silences. Cette confusion entre le mot et le bruit...aidera beaucoup Faulkner dans ses tentatives de "désintellectualisation" du contenu de la conscience...[49]

Obviously there was considerable favorable reaction to Faulkner's use of interior monologue. The French particularly found it an area of keen interest. However, admiration for Faulkner's form was not universal. All of the outright condemnation of his use of interior monologue is American. Granville Hicks is particularly critical:

> There is nothing in the story of the Compsons that requires Faulkner to use the fleeting memories of the idiotic Benjy; but disgust is made almost palpable by that device. The wild meditations of Darl and the childish hallucinations of Vardaman do very little to help us understand the Bundren family, but they intensify, even more effectively than the introduction of loathsome physical details, the horror that Faulkner wishes to arouse in the reader of As I Lay Dying.[50]

There were others, too, who had reservations: Rugoff and Robbins felt that Faulkner's use of interior monologue was not sufficiently controlled:

> When Mr. Faulkner is at his best there is scarcely a novelist who can surpass him in exploring the submarine depths of consciousness, but when he rests his narrative on the stream-of-thought of unidentified characters and runs his sentences into hopelessly tangled skeins, the reader can only shake his head and sigh.[51]

> The Sound and the Fury is a novel of power and of terrible sincerity. We do, however, find that the theme, dramatic and potentially moving, loses much of its force and clarity by being presented, almost wholly, through subjective analysis. It takes a stronger hand than William Faulkner's to divert the stream of consciousness into channels to perfect usefulness and beauty.[52]

Another serious charge, was that instead of sticking consistently to realistic dialect in his monologues, Faulkner often uses words or expresses thoughts of which his characters are not capable. This charge

implies that Faulkner undermines the realism he creates through interior monologue because of these lapses. A typical accusation is made by H.M. Campbell:

> Benjy's musings, furthermore, are never thrown into the philosophico-poetic language that sometimes destroys the illusion in the speech of the idiot Vardaman in As I Lay Dying ....This whole division of the story, ingeniously contrived as it is, would be one of the most skillful treatments of antecedent exposition in the history of the novel but for one main defect. The illusion is destroyed by the remarkable clarity and completeness with which this idiot reports the speech of the other characters, including even a Latin sentence quoted by the pseudo-philosophical father.53

Davenport makes a similar charge:

> There is a disadvantage in this experimental method [used in As I Lay Dying] for a writer of Mr. Faulkner's remarkable imaginative power, which is that many of his characters would in fact be quite unable to find words for their deep and complex feelings...54

He finds that this results in a shifting back and forth between dialogue and rich vocabulary.

The French, too, have raised this objection. As Thiébaut says, "Mais le style des monologues intérieurs est souvent trop raffiné et dérive notre pensée vers l'idée d'une oeuvre trop consciemment littéraire."55

An even larger group of critics tried in various ways to explain this inconsistency in the style of Faulkner's interior monologues. Larbaud makes an interesting proposal:

> D'autre part, on jugera peut-être que la langue des monologues intérieurs comporte des passages en style soutenu et souvent d'une grande beauté qui détonnent parmi la simplicité d'allure et la gaucherie voulue, de narration scolaire, qui compose le fond du langage pensé de la plupart des personnages. Mais il convient de remarquer que ces ruraux possèdent une culture littéraire qui, toute rudimentaire qu'elle soit, est de haute origine: formée de bribes et de morceaux des deux Testaments, d'hymnes basées sur les Psaumes, et du commentaire clérical de la secte protestante à laquelle les Bundren

> et leurs voisins appartiennent, il n'est pas surprenant qu'elle leur permette de trouver parfois, et spontanément, le ton de l'epopée et de la prophétie.[56]

This is not a proposal an American would ever have made, I think and in fact, American critics took an altogether different approach. McIlwaine finds that the effect is realistic even if the style is "modernistic trickery."

> But Faulkner's method of revealing the stream-of-consciousness in such inarticulate human beings is not the usual one of childish vocabulary and naivete. Witness the feelings of the young boy, Vardaman, described in words like "integrity" or "co-ordinated whole." Much of the content of these inner monologues is undoubtedly modernistic trickery; but, on the other hand, Faulkner has made an attempt to convey a sense of the callousness, limitation, and, at times, the strange accuteness of poor-white minds.[57]

Vickery proposes quite a complex, formal explanation:

> The stages of awareness in Darl are expressed by Faulkner through corresponding levels of language. While he is involved in action or observing it with his physical eye, his words are in dialect. His conscious thought is rendered in terms of formal language coherently and logically ordered. When he passes into the unconscious Faulkner makes no attempt on this level to modulate the stream of consciousness in terms of the character. Since the thoughts no longer pass through the conscious mind all peculiarities of the character's expression are abandonned. The style used is ornate, heightened, poetic prose. The images are not derived from Darl's experience but rather snatched from some region beyond his knowledge and comprehension.[58]

Most critics, however, conclude that Faulkner writes this way intentionally because he is not concerned with the absolute realism of his interior monologues. Frohock suggests this:

> Thus the style becomes an extraordinary sort of indirect discourse - extraordinary because while Faulkner is immensely occupied with the sensations of the characters... the language in which the sensations are reported is rarely that of the characters and frequently is so different from any language his characters could ever use that the unforewarned reader finds it ridiculous.

If Faulkner's style often seems eccentric, including "<u>mots impropres</u>,

ambiguities, overelaboration, preciousness, mixed metaphor and dislocated syntax" this is because that is the sort of impression that is being made on the mind of his character.[59]

Burnham contends that Faulkner is much more concerned with the inability to communicate than he is with reality:

> It would be definitely mistaken however to suppose that Faulkner is simply "reproducing" as nearly as possible the thoughts and feelings of the "I" through whom any given section is written, even to the extent that Joyce tries in the last part of Ulysses. The prose gives what might be called a poetic equivalent of the "stream of consciousness." It is no more a direct rendering than a painting is a sum of the canvas and paint. This is definitely clear in As I Lay Dying, which further justifies "poetic", inarticulate emotions, half formed throughts, obscured feelings are expressed, are thrown out objectively - which shows incidently how different is Faulkner's feeling for inarticulateness from the attitude seen through the underwriting of the Hemingway school. Understanding this will explain many of the obscurities, particularly the curious symbolism occurring now and then in As I Lay Dying.[60]

And Edgar Whan concludes, "No human being talks like Mr. Compson and Rosa Coldfield, and to expect these narrators to speak in idiomatic language is to deny the myth quality of Absalom, Absalom!"[61]

There does not seem to be a terribly sharp line here between the French and American criticism. Though there is some negative American criticism, much of the comment is favorable even if there are some reservations. The critics of both nations find that this narrative technique is well suited to revealing the minds of inarticulate and even "insane" people. The French, particularly, are impressed with the realism of the method. Several critics from both nations find interior monologue appropriate to Faulkner's philosophy of inarticulateness. There is some controversy over certain parts of Faulkner's interior monologue which depart from a strictly realistic style, but many find a rationale for this

also, though there is little agreement on the reason behind it.

THE AUTHOR'S PRESENCE

The use of multiple perspectives and interior monologues clearly implies that Faulkner lets his characters tell their own stories and that his existence and manipulation of the events is not obvious. A number of critics remarked on this quality: for instance, Wilson, who says, "His style is characterized by a removal as far as possible of the author from the story,"[62] and Derycke, who says that Faulkner reports the events "sans les commenter."[63] Signaux makes the comparison:

> Au contraire de Dos Passos [dans Trois Soldats], dont on devine que, dans une importante mesure il parle à travers John Andrews, Faulkner reste objectif, ne fait pas de dialogues pathétiques sur la guerre; mais son récit, plus bref, plus violent...touche autant.[64]

Campbell notes that even those novels which do not use interior monologue, but rather employ an "author-narrator" are not told in the first person and rarely approach omniscience. He finds that this expresses an uncertainty and speculation which is very important in the tone of Faulkner's novels.[65] Granville Hicks contends that in Soldier's Pay:

> Faulkner's method deliberately keeps the story remote from him and from us; he never tries to deceive us into thinking that we know these characters well, for that we cannot know anyone is part of his philosophy.[66]

Pelham Edgar agrees that Faulkner's presence is not generally noticeable, but finds that when the interior monologues use words which could not have been the character's, it seems that the thoughts are Faulkner's rather than his characters.[67]

Several others find that the author's presence is discernable. Beach feels he can distinguish between Faulkner's personal style and the style of his characters.[68] Warren Beck contends that occasionally Faulkner is more interested in the total narrative than in individual recitation.

Thus in Absalom, Absalom!, Quentin and Shreve are difficult to distinguish from the author's voice.[69] This is in sharp contrast however, to his earlier works in which each voice is carefully differentiated, as in The Sound and the Fury. Dabit feels that in the novels which use multiple perspective, the author's presence is very obvious because of the manipulation of viewpoint and other qualities.[70]

Two critics feel that Faulkner's presence is obvious in all of his works, because it is clear to them that Faulkner is manipulating his characters; that it is Faulkner's vision of the world which is dominant here. W. Troy finds that in Wuthering Heights,

> we are removed from the tempestuous center of feeling by the device of a narrator who is a model of sober and balanced vision. Even in James through his "frames" and his politely colloquial style, and in Proust, through his sustained abstract logic, we are permitted within the work itself something like a normal or social angle on the facts. Nothing so distracting is allowed us by Mr. Faulkner. From first to last we are plunged into the same world, and everything that we see and feel and think is saturated with the special atmosphere of this world. Through neither the form nor the style do we escape from the closed universe of his intensely personal vision.... [In Absalom, Absalom!] despite the elaborate orchestration the story is told through at least a half-dozen voices - the voice that we hear throughout is always the same.[71]

It is interesting that both Troy and Beck mention Absalom, Absalom!, but while the former implies that it is typical, Beck feels the exposition in that novel is something of an exception.

Claude-Edmonde Magny expresses an opinion which somewhat resembles Troy's:

> Faulkner commence par communiquer à ses créatures sa propre obsession; il leur prête devant les spectacles particuliers dont ils sont témoins le même mélange d'horreur et d'attirance qu'il ressent devant le monde en général.... D'une part l'auteur objective, sa fascination en un spectacle, il projette hors de lui son émotion en lui supposant comme origine imaginaire une contrepartie extérieure à lui (ce que T.S. Eliot a appelé un "corrélat objectif").

> Mais ce n'est pas seulement sur ce "corrélat objectif" (i.e. la structure de ses récits, l'intrigue) qu'il compte pour déclencher en nous la méme émotion, obtenir notre participation: les Témoins, les Médiateurs sont chargés de nous la communiquer par une espèce de contagion de ce qu'ils éprouvent. C'est parce qu'ils sont aussi fascinés que nous, à force de voir par leurs yeux, nous le serons à notre tour.72

It seems, then, that the Americans and the French are in surprising agreement on this subject, nor is there any particularly violent controversy within each linguistic group, though there is not complete agreement on the extent of the author's presence.

TIME

a) Distortion of Chronology

As mentioned earlier, Bowling suggests that interior monologue implies a distortion of chronology and, in fact, the two are very difficult to disassociate in Faulkner's works. However, a similar pattern, in which fragments are revealed at random and fitted together to make a whole, is found in other of Faulkner's works, such as Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, which do not make use of interior monologue. Thus the fragmentation of chronology is an extremely common and extremely important narrative technique in Faulkner's corpus. Agreement on the importance of the technique was quite general, but the success of this narrative form was highly controversial.

One common criticism of the distortion of chronology in Faulkner's works is that it delays both understanding and development of the plot. A typical comment was made by an anonymous reviewer:

> In his solicitude to present the Sartoris family as it exists today, its chronicler finds it necessary to supply a genealogical scheme of its progress from earlier times, and to do this makes frequent use of "flash-backs" into the past, in the form of long and often unprofitable anecdotes which seriously interrupt the direct realization of the present.73

Another objection was that Faulkner was deliberately making the plot as difficult and obscure as he could through this narrative technique. Granville Hicks accuses Faulkner of playing such games in the following very famous comment:

> It would almost appear that Faulkner is playing a game with his readers, a game in which he displays tremendous ingenuity and gives pleasure to the reader by stimulating a like ingenuity on his part....One can almost imagine Mr. Faulkner inventing his stories in the regular chronological order and then recasting them in some distorted form....Faulkner...almost literally writes his stories backward, and what he achieves is not a form rising organically out of the material but an arbitrary pattern.[74]

Even among more objective observors, the following comment is very common: Faulkner "begins at the end and works backward."[75] Similarly Magny says:

> Les singularités les plus apparentes de l'art faulknérien sont: d'abord l'impossibilité de raconter une histoire autrement qu'en commençant par la fin, pour remonter ensuite et comme à rebours le cours du temps...[76]

And Jean Simon states:

> Faulkner, en effet, n'entame presque jamais un récit à son début, de manière directe, pour nous conduire graduellement au dénouement. Il commence le plus souvent par la fin, nous met en présence d'éléments épars d'un problème, dont nous reconstituons péniblement l'énoncé et la solution après une série de monologues intérieurs ou de dialogues obscurs qui se recoupent et nous apportent chaque fois quelque données nouvelles.[77]

Joseph Warren Beach finds that in general Faulkner presents the situation and then begins to delve into what lies in back of this situation.[78]

There is also considerable comment on why Faulkner uses this kind of fragmentation. Bowling contends that Faulkner uses complex distortion of chronology because he is more interested in his characters' reactions than in a simple plot. This fragmented process of association highlights their state of mind.[79] Duesberg finds that, "Seul, le lecteur

attentif découvrira le principe de leur groupement: sensations, émotions, pensées s'ordonnent en constellations affectives."[80] Duesberg concludes that the extreme distortion of Quentin's section has a certain purpose behind it. "Reconnaissons que la méthode atteint pleinement son but, qui est de suggérer le désordre kaléidoscopique d'une âme qui s'apprête à affronter la mort."[81] Leibowitz also finds a certain logique underlying this distortion:

> Il devient donc évident que la suite des événements sera déterminée par des principes tout autres que ceux de la chronologie. Effectivement l'art de Faulkner, où toute analyse psychologique fait défaut, ne nous rend un événement comprehensible que lorsque celui-ci est reconstruit entièrement, constituant alors la synthèse complète d'un grand nombre d'événements antérieurs.82

Cowley remarks that, "Faulkner's novels have the quality of being lived, absorbed, remembered rather than merely observed."[83] The distortion of chronology in retelling the story contributes to this impression. Tommy Hudson seems to be replying directly to Granville Hicks' charges when he says:

> It has been remarked that Faulkner seems to begin with a chronological series of events and then deliberately rearranges them in obfuscating unchronological sequence. But in criticizing Faulkner for avoiding the chronological, one fails to recognize the purpose that the mysterious has in Faulkner's work. To defend that which cannot be defended logically, one must abrogate the rules of logic; and Faulkner does this by evoking the extraordinary.[84]

Sartre contends that to recreate a chronological story from a work such as The Sound and the Fury would be to create an entirely different story and to violate the author's intent. As he says, "Faulkner n'a pas d'abord conçu cette intrigue ordonnée pour la battre ensuite comme un jeu de cartes; il ne pouvait raconter autrement qu'il n'a fait."[85] A number of French critics support Sartre's contention. Both Guyot and

Pouillon feel that Faulkner's distortion of chronology is realistic because it conforms to our internal, subjective chronology:

> Ordonner les événements dans leur succession chronologique, c'est fausser le réel; c'est confondre le temps des montres avec ce temps psychologique qui rythme de pulsations inégales, au gré de nos sentiments, de nos souvenirs ou de nos espoirs, notre plus profonde existence. ....tout cela exigeait dans la composition même de l'oeuvre, les ruptures, les interférences, les rappels, qui traduisent, jusque dans le détail du style, l'incohérence essentielle et la discontinuité fondamentale de notre univers intérieur.[86]

> Le désordre apparent du récit a pour but, entre autres, de montrer que cette pesanteur n'est pas un artifice de narration suivie, qu'elle subsiste toujours et qu'en la suggérant on est fidèle à la nature des choses.[87]

Sartre also notes a striking similarity with an eminent French writer:

> Tel est le temps de Faulkner. Ne le reconnaît-on pas? de présent indicible et qui fait eau de toutes parts, ces brusques invasions du passé, cet ordre affectif, opposé à l'ordre intellectuel et volontaire qui est chronologique mais qui manque la réalité, ces souvenirs, hantises monstrueuses et discontinues, ces interméttances du coeur..., ne retrouve-t-on pas le temps perdu et reconquis de Marcel Proust?[88]

The French are not the only ones to mention Proust's name: Beach finds that, "Half of the interest lies, as in Proust's Recherche du temps perdu, in the very process of recovery."[89] And Maclachlan notes that, "The last chapter of The Unvanquished ("An Odor of Verbena") follows Marcel Proust in attaching poetic recollection of things past to the human sense of smell."[90]

It would seem that the preceding comments contain some very important implications: that is, interior monologue may be necessarily accompanied by a distortion of chronology, but the tremendous importance of the past in Faulkner is not concomitant to either interior monologue or distortion of chronology. One finds both of these narrative techniques in Ulysses

and yet one does not find such a strong similarity with Proust's delving into the past, while on the other hand, Proust did not have to use an experimental technique to rediscover the past. Thus, the importance of the past is closely woven into Faulkner's distortion of chronology, but it is Faulkner's philosophical addition to that narrative technique and not necessarily attendant on the process itself.

b) The Importance of the Past

In discussing the implications about time we are leaving what must strictly be considered narrative technique. Rather we are dealing here with the philosophy or métaphysique behind the technique. It is here that form and content becomes more difficult to distinguish.

Frohock notes that both present and past may impinge simultaneously on the minds of Faulkner's characters. He finds that this is not the same as "flash-backs", because the past is so much a part of the present. Frohock concludes that there are two planes of action in Faulkner's work: "one present and dramatic, the other past and explicative but always influencing the present...."[91] Bowling suggests that in Quentin's and Benjy's section of The Sound and the Fury the past is used to express and explain the present, and present events and past recollections are completely intermingled.[92] On this matter, Hudson makes the most perceptive comments:

> But mere consciousness of a dead past is not enough; the sense of the past must be vital, dynamic, if it is to avail modern man at all. We see how Faulkner views the past when we approach his conception of time. He does not trichotomize time - past, present, future - as is usual; rather time is one.[93]

It is clear that some American critics did recognize this aspect of Faulkner's work, but very few. It is a subject which American criticism

dealt with little, quite late in our chosen time period, and never in any great depth. This was not the case with French criticism. Being drawn particularly to questions of métaphysique, the French were fascinated with the implications of Faulkner's time and they have discussed it at length. To be sure, there is some repetition of ideas, but some of the finest French critics of the period have analyzed this question in depth.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the interest shown in this subject was the precedent which Sartre set in his article "A propos de Le Bruit et le fureur: la temporalité chez Faulkner." In this quite early article, published in the Nouvelle Revue Française in 1939, Sartre considered the importance of time in Faulkner's work and this undoubtedly inspired other critics to comment. In facts, very few discussions of Faulkner's use of time fail to mention Sartre and his views.

To summarize Sartre's views as briefly as possible, it seems that he was struck by a peculiar quality in The Sound and the Fury, that is, "Rien n'advient, l'histoire ne se déroule pas...."[94] Sartre suggests that the central point of Faulkner's work is the tragedy of man's temporality:

> Le malheur de l'homme est d'être temporel. "Un homme est la somme de ses propres malheurs. On pourrait penser que le malheur finirait un jour par se lasser, mais alors c'est le temps qui devient votre propre malheur." Tel est le veritable sujet du roman. Et si la technique que Faulkner adopte semble tout d'abord une négation de la temporalité, c'est que nous confondons la temporalité avec la chronologie. C'est l'homme qui a inventé les dates et les horloges....Pour parvenir au temps réel, il faut abandonner cette mesure inventée qui n'est mesure de rien.95

Sartre compares Faulkner's view of the world "à celle d'un homme assis dans une auto découverte et qui regarde en arrière."[96] He feels that only when things are relived or retold does their real significance

become apparent.[97] This recalls something of Proust's attitude toward time, and Sartre discusses at some length the similarities and differences between Faulkner and Proust:

> Je ne me dissimule pas les différences [entre Proust et Faulkner]: je sais, par exemple, que le salut, pour Proust, est dans le temps même, dans la réapparition intégrale du passé. Pour Faulkner au contraire, le passé n'est jamais perdu - malheureusement -, il est toujours là, c'est une obsession....Pour Faulkner, il faut oublier le temps....
> Mais pour Faulkner comme pour Proust, le temps est, avant tout, ce qui sépare.[98]

Sartre reaches some interesting conclusions about why Proust was not an experimenter in form as Faulkner was:

> A dire le vrai, la technique romanesque de Proust aurait dû être celle de Faulkner, c'était l'aboutissement logique de sa métaphysique. Seulement Faulkner est un homme perdu et c'est parce qu'il se sent perdu qu'il risque, qu'il va jusqu'au bout de sa pensée. Proust est un classique et un Français: les Français se perdent à la petite semaine et ils finissent toujours par se retrouver. L'éloquence, le goût des idées claires, l'intellectualisme ont imposé à Proust de garder au moins les apparences de la chronologie.[99]

He also finds similarities in their view of the future, "Proust et Faulkner l' [le temps] ont simplement décapité, ils lui ont ôté son avenir, c'est-à-dire la dimension des actes et de la liberté."[100]

It is this absence of any future in Faulkner that Sartre finds most critical. The past not only denies the existence of any future, it even destroys any present in the traditional sense of the word. "Par-délà ce présent il n'y a rien, puisque l'avenir n'est pas."[101] Sartre explains how he perceives Faulkner's "present" at greater length:

> L'autre caractère de ce présent, c'est l'enfoncement. J'use de ce mot, faute de mieux, pour marquer une sorte de mouvement immobile de ce monstre informe. Chez Faulkner il n'y a jamais de progression, rien qui vienne de l'avenir. Le présent n'a pas été d'abord une possibilité future, comme lorsque mon ami paraît enfin après avoir été celui que j'attends. Non: être présent, c'est paraître sans raison et s'enfoncer.[102]

Sartre feels that for Faulkner the past is totally dominant: man is the sum of his misfortunes and his past. And Faulkner's manner of narrating his novels reinforces this impression; "Nous avions déjà noté, à propos de Sartoris, que Faulkner montrait toujours les événements quand ils s'étaient accomplis. Dans Le Bruit et le fureur tout se passe dans les coulisses: rien n'arrive, tout est arrivé."[103] Though Sartre clearly admires a great deal about Faulkner's work, he takes issue with this view of time. For Sartre, it is essential that man have a future:

> L'homme n'est point la somme de ce qu'il a, mais la totalité de ce qu'il n'a pas encore, de ce qu'il pourrait avoir....
> L'absurdité que Faulkner trouve dans une vie humaine, je crains qu'il ne l'y ait mise d'abord....Le désespoir de Faulkner me paraît intérieur à sa métaphysique: pour lui, comme pour nous tous, l'avenir est barré....J'aime son art, je ne crois pas à sa métaphysique: un avenir barré, c'est encore un avenir...[104]

Pouillon also made some very important statements about Faulkner's use of time. He begins, not too differently from Sartre, by saying, "L'histoire ne se déroule pas, elle forme un bloc."[105] But Pouillon's greatest interest was in the supremacy of the past: "Le passé est vraiment pour Faulkner la dimension essentielle du temps."[106] Speaking of The Sound and the Fury, Pouillon finds that Faulkner's past is a subjective past and that the present evokes the past. Faulkner uses the memories of his characters to reveal them:

> ...la persistance des impressions passés, surtout des impressions d'enfance, fait que, selon Faulkner, ce que nous vivons au présent est pour ainsi dire submergé par ce que nous avons vécu au passé. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'évocation au sens ordinaire du mot, mais d'une sorte de pèsée constante de ce qui fut sur ce qui est.[107]

Pouillon finds memory extremely important:

> Ainsi la conscience est-elle avant tout mémoire;....
> Ainsi la mémoire ne se connaît pas comme mémoire, elle n'est pas le sens de l'inexistant actuellement, mais

> bien le sens du réel, et puisque la mémoire ne peut être cependant autre chose que le sens du passé, il faut dire, ce qui est essentiellement faulknérien: ce qui est réel, c'est le passé.[108]

Pouillon contends that the past does not determine or cause the present, because the two are so close they cannot really be distinguished. "...il n'y a pas à proprement parler détermination, mais coexistence du passé qui pèse sur le présent."[109] Because the past cannot be relegated to a simple chronological position, it is not temporal, but rather "intemporel."

As with Sartre, Pouillon finds that the past dominates the future as well as the present:

> C'est donc le passé qui non seulement fut, mais qui est et sera. En ce sens on peut bien dire que le temps est le déroulement de ce destin. Mais il importe de bien marquer deux points: d'abord ce déroulement n'en est pas rendu nécessaire et univoque; peu importe ce qui se passera, car le destin faulknérien n'est pas suspendu à la réalisation d'un événement particulier et toujours contingent...[110]

Pouillon contends that Faulkner has a number of technical devices which he uses to convey this sense of the past. The first, and most crucial, is the disordering of chronology. A conventional chronology would create a series of mutually exclusive "maintenants," and would create pasts, presents and futures which would make Faulkner's conception of the past impossible.[111] Pouillon also remarks that Faulkner uses the past tense even to describe events which are taking place in the present. Pouillon uses Tommy's murder in Sanctuary as an example. "En somme, tout ce qui arrive est toujours si brusque que c'est aussitôt passé et que ce ne peut être raconté que comme un souvenir, même lorsqu'il s'agit d'un récit direct."[112]

Pouillon also compares Proust and Faulkner. He finds that for both,

the past is a present reality and, in fact, for Quentin and Marcel, the past is more real than the present. But there are differences between the two writers. For Proust the past is an individual matter, unlike the past in Faulkner. Also Proust takes a more intellectual approach, and delves into the past through thought, while Faulkner's characters seem to actually live their pasts. "Par suite un personnage de Faulkner ne repense pas à son passé, il le vit tout simplement, pour y repenser, il faudrait qu'il apparaisse décalé d'un présent bien réel, et c'est ce qui se passe chez Proust." In Proust the past and present do not merge: "la chronologie et le temps retrouvé" remain distinct. Because he retains both, an important part of his analysis is devoted to the conflict between objective and subjective time. Since Faulkner deals exclusively with the past, he is concerned only with the subjective.[113]

Sartre's and Pouillon's analyses were the most important and influential on the subject of time. But, naturally, there were a great many other comments, some of which we will consider. Le Breton agrees with the accuracy of a chronology by association:

> A cette absence de perspective chronologique...s'ajoute une autre cause d'obscurité, l'absence de toute logique. Les tristes héros d'As I Lay Dying offraient au moins une logique rudimentaire....D'ailleurs, Faulkner ne fait ici que se conformer à la réalité psychologique la plus profonde: l'association par contiguïté, la plus rudimentaire, est maîtresse absolue à ces profondeurs: nous sommes ici au-dessous du domaine de l'intelligence.[114]

There also seems to be general agreement about the unity of past and present, and also about the lack of any future. Le Breton comments:

> Mais en chacune des consciences individuelles dont il nous est donné d'entendre le monologue intérieur, le passé et le présent vivent d'une vie identique et simultanée. Une réminiscence ne se distingue pas d'une sensation fraîche.[115]

Marcel Arland adds:

> Brusquement l'histoire s'interrompt pour recommencer dix ou vingt ans en arrière. C'est ici l'art de Faulkner, qui est grand, et c'est l'une des formes de sa pensée, qu'il pourrait aisément justifier. Le présent et le passé, semble-t-il dire, coexistent en tout homme, à tout instant; rien de plus naturel donc que de mêler tout l'un à l'autre dans un récit, et d'éclairer un fait présent par une action depuis longtemps accomplie.116

c) The Sense of Destiny or Fate in Faulkner's Work

Faulkner's presentation of time is necessarily fatalistic. As Sartre perceived, where there is no future there is no hope. The French were cognizant of this quality from the very beginning, partly because of Malraux's early and influential preface which remarked on this in Faulkner:

> Certains grands romans furent d'abord pour leur auteur la création de la seule chose qui pût le submerger. Et, comme Lawrence s'enveloppe dans la sexualité, Faulkner s'enfouit dans l'irrémédiable.
>
> Monde où l'homme n'existe qu'écrasé. Il n'y a pas d'"homme" de Faulkner, ni de valeurs, ni même de psychologie, malgré les monologues intérieurs de ses premiers livres. Mais il y a un Destin dressé, unique, derrière tous ces êtres différents et semblables, comme la mort derrière une salle d'incurables.117

Pouillon also had a considerable amount to say about destiny in Faulkner. He felt that the weight of the past is felt by Faulkner's characters: they cannot escape it, the past becomes their destiny. Yet this destiny does not imply a causality or determinism, because determinism requires a fixed chronology and a place of greater importance for the present. Pouillon explains how the past affects the present without determinism:

> On peut bien dire que le passé le plus lointain agit sur le présent, mais ce n'est pas par l'intermédiaire d'une série de causes bien mises à leur place dans le temps: il agit par sa présence immédiate, parce que, passé, il est.... Le Destin n'est donc pas une causalité qui courrait le long du temps et agirait par cela même en liant des instants dans l'ordre dans lequel ils se succèdent; son ac-

> tion est purement psychologie: le passé est dans la conscience présente du personnage, il ne lui est pas extérieur. Christmas n'est pas déterminé par son passé, il est son passé, et c'est donc dans sa psychologie qu'il faut chercher la raison pour laquelle il se sent sous l'emprise d'une fatalité, et non dans une structure particulière du temps indépendante de ce qui la remplit.[118]

Pouillon makes a subtle distinction between his view and Malraux's:

> ...sans doute comme le dit Malraux (préface à Sanctuaire), c'est un "monde où l'homme n'existe qu'écrasé", mais cet écrasement vient du dedans, et non du dehors: il se fait écrasé, plus qu'il n'est écrasé.[119]

Thus it follows that:

> ...on peut dire que tous les héros de ses romans se sentent en quelque sorte responsables de leur destinée; que du moins ils ont toujours la prescience de ce qui en résultera pour eux, et cela précisément parce que leur destin vit pour eux, en eux....Cette conscience sans connaissance du destin se voit donc en ce que les héros savent, sans pourtant le savoir clairement, ce qui les attend: ils ne peuvent être surpris par ce qui arrive, parce qu'ils savent bien qu'aucun futur ne les fera sortir de leur passé.[120]

Pouillon also makes a further, important distinction between Proust and Faulkner. Proust sought feeling and knowledge, whereas Faulkner chose only feeling and consciousness. But to understand the past is to destroy its fatalistic power. "...l'exemple de Proust verifie ainsi ce que nous disions: la compréhension du destin en est la dissolution."[121]

Sartre, and those who followed him, were of the opinion that Faulkner's heros are extremely passive in the face of their destiny. Unlike classical tragedy, these protagonists are resigned to their fate and give up without a fight. Picon clarifies this distinction:

> Le goût de la Fatalité n'est pas chez lui [Faulkner] ce qu'il fut chez Nietzsche, ce qu'il est chez Malraux: la volonté de contraindre l'homme à révéler sa grandeur. Devant son Destin, l'homme de Faulkner n'oppose pas ce refus, cette sublime injure du héros shakespearien qui le libère au sein même de son écrasement. Il le subit sans que rien en lui ne s'y oppose et ne l'en distingue.[122]

Fernandez makes a similar observation. "...ces personnages sont tragiques,

mais d'un tragique spécial, où la passivité, l'étouffement, l'enlisement du cauchemar dominent."[123] Magny also comments on the passivity of Faulkner's heros:

> Parce qu'ils regardent obstinément leur passé, lès personnages de ses récits se laissent fasciner par lui et comme dévorer; on dirait parfois qu'ils lui donnent volontairement permission de venir les écraser; il consentent à ce Moloch.... Ils n'ont de cesse que leur vie ne soit devenue destinée. Les yeux fixés sur un passé qui a réussi à englober même un avenir auquel personne ne croit plus, ils attendent avec une sorte d'espoir dans le désespoir la catastrophe imprévisible et nécessaire qui va fondre sur eux en se berçant du récit envoûtant des gloires de leurs ancêtres.[124]

But this was not a completely universal opinion. Jean-Jacques Mayoux feels that Faulkner's heros remain unvanquished:

> C'est en effet en cela que consiste la victoire des personnages de Faulkner: s'ils sont, les plus faulknériens d'entre eux, invaincus, c'est qu'ils regardent en face leur défaite et qu'ils ne l'acceptent pas. La défaite est inévitable.[125]

In general, the American critics did not have as much to say about time as the French critics, but the recognition of fatality in Faulkner's work was quite widespread. As John Arthos perceives, "...men are inextricably controlled by the past...."[126] Frohock contends that the impending catastrophe is revealed in two distinct ways:

> The present plane catches the action at the beginning of a crisis and follows through to catastrophe; the past plane catches everything which makes the catastrophe inevitable.[127]

Whittemore believes, as did Sartre and most of the French critics, that Faulkner's heros accept their fate, but he makes a distinction which denies that this acceptance is always passive. He feels that the lower classes are passively resigned to their fate, but for the aristocracy there is "the furious acceptance of fate, not waited for but run at, the reckless plunge at death..."[128]

The American critics seem more likely to comment on the lack of

free will, rather than using concepts of destiny or fate. Hopper suggests that man's spiritual aspirations fail because he has so little control over His life.[129] Cowley notes that Faulkner's characters almost seem possessed and they completely lack free will. Most of these characters are "defeated by circumstances and they carry with them a sense of their own doom."[130] And Whittemore concludes:

> ...perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn about that world is that no one of it is granted the privilege of choice; therefore no one of it is free to be good or evil, right or wrong, a hero or a villian.[131]

Spears, appearing in the French press, makes the comment that the sense of destiny in Faulkner closely resembles that in folklore:

> Comme les personnages des mythes ou des contes de fées, les personnages de Faulkner agissent sous la contrainte pour des fins préconçues, et jamais ils ne prennent une décision consciente.[132]

American critics also seem to have recognized and appreciated the appeal and power of impending doom in Faulkner's novels. Chamberlain notes:

> But the power to suggest a hundred horrors behind the immediate horror, the power to tell a complicated story of human evil working out its strange and inevitable destiny without respect of persons that is in Sanctuary, is undeniable.[133]

And Frohock feels that, "It is undoubtedly the omnipresence of this always-imminent, nameless evil that gives such books their fascination and power, their ability to terrify and attract at once."[134]

The subject of Faulkner's use of time has been largely dominated by the French critics. A group of American critics, following Granville Hicks, objected to what they considered to be the unnecessary and unfruitful difficulty which accompanied Faulkner's distortion of chronology. Particularly in the later periods there are American defenders

of this technique, but the French seem unanimous in their appreciation of Faulkner's distortion of chronology. The French also discussed at length and in depth the philosophical implications of a dominant past in Faulkner's work, a subject in which the Americans showed very little interest. Even the discussion of fatality is dominated by the French critics, though the American critics, finding the subject of free will of interest and importance, do make some comment here.

MULTIPLE PLOTS

a) Faulkner as a short story writer.

Claude-Edmonde Magny has said that Faulkner's technique is characterized by "...le besoin d'avoir toujours au moins simultanément deux histoires à raconter...."[135] If one recalls the complex structure of such works as Light in August and Wild Palms, to mention only the most obvious, it is clear that Faulkner often does tell more than one story at a time. This narrative technique also contributes to the complexity of Faulkner's work.

Here again, the American critical audience was not enthusiastic. Rather than finding the multiplicity of plot rich and effective, Faulkner was criticized for discontinuity and fragmentation. This attack was not aimed at simply one or two works, but nearly all of Faulkner's corpus. Cowley finds that nearly all the novels are structurally flawed because of this quality: Light in August deals with two poorly related themes, The Wild Palms contains two stories with no relationship, The Hamlet is a series of episodes, as is The Unvanquished, which began as a series of unrelated magazine stories.[136] Fadiman adds Sanctuary to this list, contending that it contains two separate stories: Horace Benbow on one hand, and Popeye and Temple on the other.[137] Campbell sees two

stories in Absalom, Absalom!, one taking place in the past and one in the present.[138] Leslie Fiedler concludes that, "Only in Absalom, Absalom! and The Sound and the Fury has Faulkner worked out genuine full-length narratives by extension rather than patchwork...." And he finds that even this length is attained by telling the same story from different points of view.[139]

A considerable number of critics, including Cowley and Fiedler, came to the conclusion that Faulkner was basically a short story writer. These critics felt that, not only does the structure of Faulkner's novels indicate that he preferred, perhaps without being aware of it, the shorter form, but also, that his short stories were just simply better than his novels. As Snell says:

> If we had only the novels to judge Faulkner's stature by, we would still be right in calling him one of the great romantic writers of our time. However, we have the short stories with which to compare the novels, and that comparison sets up a standard which the long narratives fall very far short of.[140]

Faulkner is often referred to as a "story-teller" by those who appreciated his work. As Beach says it is Faulkner's gift for enthralling the reader and leading him on, which makes him "a born storyteller."[141] Loggins also finds this admirable. "He [Faulkner] is a master artist at story-telling - a conjurer who knows all the tricks of verisimilitude, intense drama, suspense, and shattering surprises."[142]

Rice finds many of Faulkner's techniques are better suited to the short story form: the reliance on craftsmanship, the "morbid" and "violent" subject matter, the static characters surrounded by action, revelation rather than development of characters, and the "jolt of realization" which Faulkner often uses.[143]

Beach and Birney both contend that Faulkner's short stories are more

popular than his novels.[144] A considerable number of critics, including Birney and Beach, suggest that Faulkner was not able to sustain in a long work the qualities which make his short stories so fine.[145] At the time these critics were writing it is very likely that Faulkner's short stories were more popular, that is, they sold better than his longer works, but in retrospect this criticism seems somewhat strange. It seems to me quite likely that the critics who preferred Faulkner's short stories did so because this form was technically less complex and hence more accessible to them.

The French critics were aware of this quality in Faulkner, but the comments on Faulkner as a short story writer are much less numerous. Picon says:

> Les dimensions et les exigences de la nouvelle n'ont pas gêné Faulkner: si l'on peut dire de la plupart de ces récits qu'ils contiennent la matière d'un roman, il convient d'ajouter que ces romans consistent en général en une succession de nouvelles.[146]

And Anne-Marie Soulac notes:

> Ces "short-stories" ne diffèrent des romans que par leur moindre substance; la manière, l'atmosphère sont les mêmes et les effets obtenus sont quelquefois plus saisissants encore à cause de la condensation nécessaire des développements....[147]

Though clearly aware of the matter, neither of these quotations seem to imply any sharp criticism of Faulkner's novels because of structural defects, nor any preferance for his short stories over his novels. In general, it seems that the French did not like the short story genre as much as they enjoyed the form of the novel, and hence it is not surprising that there is no French criticism crying for Faulkner to give up novels for a shorter form. In fact, Blanzat found Faulkner's short stories less satisfactory than other contemporary American writers'

and he found that Faulkner's techniques are not well suited to the short story form:

> Les qualités caractéristiques de Faulkner, la complexité psychologique, la profondeur poétique, l'obscurité volontaire, la nouveauté des moyens techniques, réclament de la place et passent mal dans un court récit.[148]

b) Thematic Structure

In order to explain the undeniable multiple plots in Faulkner's work, the French and some American critics suggested thematic structure. Maurice Coindreau was perhaps the originator of this kind of criticism in France when he argued that Faulkner's structure is essentially musical:

> A une première lecture, The Sound and the Fury produit une impression d'étrangeté assez semblable à celle que procure à des oreilles accoutumées aux harmonies classiques, l'audition d'un morceau de musique moderne. Et cela n'a rien qui doive nous étonner car la composition de ce roman est d'ordre essentiellement musical. Comme le compositeur, Faulkner emploie le système des thèmes. Ce n'est pas, comme dans la fugue, un thème unique qui évolue et se transforme, ce sont des thèmes multiples qui s'amorcent, s'évanouissent, reparaissent pour disparaître encore jusqu'au moment ou ils éclatent dans toute leur plénitude.[149]

The French critics were very receptive to this line of argument, and similar comments can be found elsewhere in French criticism. As Henry Malherbe says:

> Certains signes venus d'ailleurs nous révèlent même que l'art du romancier touche à la technique de la composition musicale. William Faulkner, qu'on place, à juste titre, au premier rang des écrivains Américains, nourrit et traite ses récents sujets littéraires exactement comme s'il s'agissait de sonates ou de symphonies.[150]

Guyot adds, "Faulkner usant sans cesse du monologue intérieur et de ces rappels de thèmes qui font songer à une composition musicale."[151]

Certain novels seem to have been particularly controversial. In America the justification for the structure of Light in August was a matter of great debate. There were several, like Cowley, who did not

find the juxtaposition of Lena and Joe's stories effective. But there were American critics willing to defend Faulkner's structure. H.M. Campbell is one who finds a thematic unity in Light in August, that theme being, "...the brooding, self-conscious, introverted life imposed by modern civilization on both Joe and Hightower, as contrasted with the simple, normal virtues of a life close to nature like that of Lena..."[152] Canby simply sees this as "the opposition of those whom life accepts and those whom it rejects...."[153] Hirshleifer finds several, simultaneous parallels: 1) Calvinsim versus "unpretentious faith", 2) violence, martyrdom and death versus those representing a life force.[154] Hirshleifer explains what he feels to be the theme of Light in August at some length:

> The central theme of Light in August is that of man's inhumanity and the ruin it brings upon him. It is a theme seen on several levels, historically in terms of slavery and the Civil War, on the personal level as violence between man and his fellow man and the revulsion between man and woman which is generally symbolic of the rejection of divine love.[155]

Another book which came under a great deal of criticism in America for its fragmentation was The Wild Palms. Many critics could find no relationship whatsoever, and found the discontinuity annoying. The French, however, were quick to find a thematic unity and even in America Kazin and a few others felt that the two stories "form a single narrative in theme."[156]

The Unvanquished was also controversial. It was readily apparent to American critics that this novel was composed of short stories that had appeared in various magazines, and the general conclusion was that this constituted a defect. The French did not react this way. Because of the information which Coindreau made available in one of his reviews, French critics were aware that this novel was virtually a work of collected

short stories. But Coindreau, and other critics after him, found the whole coherent and hence saw the work as a testimony to Faulkner's craftsmanship. As Coindreau says, "...The Unvanquished forme un récit parfaitement cohérent, une fresque des mieux équilibrées qui se déroule, sans répétitions, avec un intérêt croissant."[157] And Lalou adds, "La maîtrise de Faulkner n'en est que plus remarquable, car ces sept épisodes [de The Unvanquished] constituent un vrai roman...."[158]

In total, the French critics are again more appreciative of Faulkner's work than the Americans. The French critics do not find Faulkner's novels inferior to his short stories and they generally felt that the use of multiple plots as a technique was justified.

WITHHELD INFORMATION

Multiple perspectives, interior monologue, distortion of chronology and multiple plots all tend to fragment the story. All of these narrative techniques contribute to the impression of withheld information, because the information the reader needs to make a coherent whole of the story is delayed. The cumulative effect is an ostensible chaos in which only slowly are all the pieces of the puzzle fitted together. This technique closely parallels Faulkner's use of words to evocative and suggestive ends, without necessarily providing any clear or precise understanding. The cumulative impression is one of obscurity, but theoretically there are two alternatives: the speculation may develop into suspense which is finally dispelled by a cumulative understanding, or the sense of enigma may remain because the understanding is never complete. It would seem that these possibilities should be mutually exclusive, but somehow they are not. Instead both happen simultaneously: we witness revelations which make the story understandable, yet, as if

some things are beyond the intellect, just as some things are beyond words, the sense of enigma remains. As Burnham implies, enigma and understanding are constants which pervade the whole book:

> ...in fact there is no development in these two novels. [The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying.] There is an initial obscurity which gradually becomes clarified as if the whole book were implicit in the first page.[159]

As with Faulkner's use of diction, the tone and atmosphere created by this cumulative impression of withheld information is a very crucial quality in his work.

Although withheld information is really the sum of many of Faulkner's techniques, most of which we have already discussed, this is a topic which drew a certain amount of comment as a general technique or as an extension of previously mentioned techniques. The highly subjective nature of Faulkner's form contributes largely to the withholding of information. As Marcel Arland says:

> Il n'est d'autre part pour Faulkner aucune réalité objective; un événement n'a pas en soi de figure; il n'existe que par la conscience qu'en prennent les acteurs et les spectateurs. De là vient la perpétuelle tendance de Faulkner à ne pas nous présenter directement un fait, mais à nous le suggérer par les récits, le plus souvent fragmentaires, des spectateurs. Il faut, pour saisir l'intrigue de ses livres, une suite de patients recoupements.[160]

The fragmentation of viewpoint, and lack of any omniscient narrator, mean that there is no single correct reality in many cases. Beck and Beach note the quality of speculation and reinterpretation one finds in Absalom, Absalom! which is characteristic of this ambivalent reality.[161] Campbell comments that the shifting narration creates a suspense which is often highly dramatic, because of the information which is withheld in this way.[162]

Schwartz and Van Doren both remark on the preponderance of physical

description and the concommitant lack of explanation of motivation.[163] It seems that this is an extension of the way in which Faulkner uses interior monologue. There is never any explanation or elaboration given in Faulkner. Van Doren comments on Faulkner's use of understatement[164] and Chamberlain notes that in such works as Sanctuary the "pathological implications" are left unsaid.[165]

The French are particularly articulate on the subject of Faulkner's obscurity. For the French critics, Faulkner's éllipses are very important in his work; what is left unsaid, on several levels, is an integral part of the whole. Sartre was one of the first to comment on this:

> Il y a une recette: ne pas dire, rester secret, déloyalement secret - dire un peu...les descriptions de Dreiser veulent enseigner, sont documentaires. Ici les gestes (enfiler des bottes, monter un escalier, sauter sur un cheval) ne visent pas à peindre, mais à cacher....
> On voudrait dire: "Trop de gestes," comme on disait: "Trop de notes" à Mozart. Trop de mots aussi. La volubilité de Faulkner, son style abstrait, superbe, anthropomorphique de prédicateur: encore des trompe-l'oeil....
> Le véritable drame est derrière, derrière l'ennui, derrière les gestes, derrière les consciences. Tout à coup, du fond de ce drame, surgit l'Acte, comme un aérolithe. Un Acte - enfin quelque chose qui arrive, un message. Mais Faulkner nous déçoit encore: il décrit rarement les Actes. C'est qu'il rencontre et tourne un vieux problème de la technique romanesque: les Actes font l'essentiel du roman....Faulkner ne les nomme pas, n'en parle pas et, par là, suggère qu'ils sont innombrables, par-delà le langage. Il montrera seulement leurs résultats....[166]

Others, such as Brodin, followed Sartre's line of argument quite closely, "[Faulkner] décrit rarement des actes, mais plutôt des gestes, et ses gestes, au lieu de peindre, masquent les choses et jettent un voile sur les consciences."[167] Jean Simon comes to a somewhat similar analysis of Faulkner's work on the linguistic level:

> D'où le parti de s'écarter des raisonnements bien conduits par lesquels les sentiments sont "expliqués": au contraire, les hommes et les femmes de Faulkner s'expriment volontiers

> par éllipses, par membres de phrases sans rapport apparent avec ce qui précède, mais lourds de sens quand on y regarde de plus près.[168]

Claude-Edmonde Magny also describes what she feels is Faulkner's technique of obscurity:

> La Négation est pour Faulkner un des grands moyens de préserver cette obscurité matricielle dont son art a besoin. Sous ses formes les plus simples, d'abord; un moyen presque simpliste de restituer à l'acte la "part d'ombre" sans laquelle il ne saurait être pleinement réel consiste à ne pas tout nous dire, à laisser l'essentiel précisément dans l'ombre.[169]

The French also made a number of suggestions about why Faulkner chose to use this technique. Fernandez implies that Sanctuary may be obscure partially because delicacy did not permit Faulkner to be explicit:

> La manière de M. Faulkner déroute un peu d'abord. Les personnages, vus de très près mais baignés dans leur propre mystère, se situent mal les uns par rapport aux autres et semblait flotter dans un univers sans contours. Respectueux à l'extrême de la présence, de l'impression immédiate, l'auteur explique difficilement - certains passages - ceux notamment relatifs au viol de Temple - peut-être aussi parce que ce qu'il a à dire est si terrible qu'il ne peut pas toujours le dire. Mais à mesure qu'on avance, le roman prend forme et poids, et quand nous le refermons, il pèse sur nous de toute sa masse implacable et magnifique. La beauté de ligne de certains personnages...la vérité des atmosphères et des saisons, la pression d'un destin tragique partout sensible compensent largement les obscurités et les incertitudes du récit.[170]

Le Breton and Magny both agree that the obscurity is an important part in Faulkner's method of involving the reader in his work. Le Breton says:

> La méthode indirecte de Faulkner, nécessairement subtile, tient compte de ces ménagements indispensables. Pour arriver au réel profond, Faulkner contourne les apparences, suggère beaucoup plus qu'il n'affirme, fait appel à notre sentiment plutôt qu'à notre intelligence. Ce n'est pas un artifice littéraire seulement qui fait qu'il demande beaucoup à notre collaboration. C'est que chacun de nous, individuellement, nous pouvons beaucoup lui donner. Il compte sur nous pour enrichir de souvenirs personnels les suggestions qu'il offre et qui cherchent plus à

> à nous orienter en nous-mêmes qu'à fixer de façon illusoire la mouvante réalité du moi.[171]

And Magny adds:

> S'il est si volontiers obscur, ce n'est nullement par mépris du lecteur; au contraire, ses énigmes lui sont autant de moyens de s'assurer notre complicité. Grâce à elles, en un mot, il nous force à nous substituer à lui, à devenir comme les auteurs de ce que nous lisons.[172]

Faÿ also finds a logical justification for Faulkner's obscurity:

> Chez Faulkner, l'obscurité n'est point, comme chez Wolfe, le résultat d'un désir confus, indistinct et universel, mais d'un choix de l'esprit. Pas un seul de ses mots ni une seule de ses anecdotes qui ne soit voulue et calculée. Faulkner peint l'obscurité de la vie, car l'obscurité de la vie est ce qui l'a frappé. Il juge que l'obscurité est l'attribut principal de l'existence, et qu'elle en est aussi l'excuse, la sauvegarde, le remède. Sans elle, sous le grand soleil du Sud, il n'existerait ni activité, ni émotion, ni joie. C'est par elle que se crée cette atmosphère tragique...[173]

It is clear that the French critics not only find Faulkner's obscurity worthy of criticism, but they also find very little fault with this technique. Marcel Aymé, writing in the American press, was an exception to this, for he felt that Faulkner's obscurity was unnecessary and that the clarity of Faulkner's later works indicate that Faulkner himself was aware of this.[174]

Though there is American coverage of this topic, it is not as penetrating, and several critics found this technique unsuccessful. Oscar Cargill, for instance, says, "It must be flatly asserted that Faulkner has gained not a single thing from his method of narrative in [Light in August], while he has lost much."[175] Fadiman, a consistant antagonist of Faulkner's is also opposed to the complexity and obscurity of Faulkner's narrative technique:

> Then we have what may be called Anti-Narrative, a set of complex devices used to keep the story from being told.

> Mr. Faulkner is very clever at this. He gets quite an interesting effect, for example, by tearing the Sutpen chronicle into pieces, as if a mad child were to go to work on it with a pair of shears, and then having each of the jagged divisions narrated by a different personage...[176]

> Those who like guessing games will be eager to trace these profound parallels and will doubtless succeed in doing so, which does not alter the fact that solving a puzzle and reading a novel are separate mental activities.[177]

To some extent Fadiman's reaction typifies the total American reaction to Faulkner's narrative technique. Fadiman and many other American critics found the complexity of Faulkner's work unnecessary. Many felt that the orchestration which results from multiple points of view, multiple plots and distorted chronology was simply chaos, rather than a richly saturated approach to the novel. However, American criticism was not entirely negative: there were at least a few defenders for each of Faulkner's major narrative techniques. The French criticism, however, still seems much more favorable and much more penetrating. Several outstanding critics, such as Sartre, Pouillon and Magny, were not content to simply look at the narrative technique, but they went further to analyze the <u>métaphysique</u> operating behind the technique.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE IMPORTANCE OF FORM IN FAULKNER'S WORK

There is no doubt that form is a very important part of Faulkner's work - some have argued that it is even the most important part. His interest in innovative and complex narrative techniques, as well as the distinctive style he uses, indicates clearly Faulkner's formalistic concerns. Though much of his innovation sprang from contemporary influences, such as interior monologue, and distortion of chronology, nonetheless, Faulkner's form set him apart from most of his American contemporaries. Coming in the wake of Hemingway and the school of low-key, journalistic writing, Faulkner seems curiously out of step.

At least partly because of this disparity, Faulkner was criticized not only for the particular expression his form took, but also because of what many American critics saw as his excessive interest in form. A typical attitude is one expressed by Cushing. "In any consideration of Mr. Faulkner's work the question of method takes precedence over that of intention, for it is quite apparent that he himself is first of all concerned with it."[1] An extremely common criticism of Faulkner by American critics is that he was so preoccupied with formal matters, that his work contains no ideas, no philosophy and, for many critics, no moral justification which would give his novels either intellectual or social value. These critics felt that Faulkner's form existed in a vacuum without any rationale for existence.

Perhaps the most common criticism was that Faulkner's promise as a writer was atrophying because of his obsession with form. J. Donald

Adams believes that "...William Faulkner, potentially one of the ablest writers of his generation, [is] hopelessly, as it seems to me, involved in his own technical virtuosity, and blocked by his preoccupation with the pathological ills of mankind."[2] Cushing simply feels that Faulkner's varied experiments interefered with his ability to write:

> This [the advent of a solution to the problem of form], let us hope, will be soon - for until Mr. Faulkner exhausts or overcomes his interest in method, in technique, his work must continue to be a promise rather than a realization of our desire for the appearance of a genuine and really important creative talent in the field of American literature.[3]

DeVoto criticized Faulkner very harshly for the lack of depth beneath the form:

> All the prestidigitation of his later technique rests on a tacit promise that this tortuous narrative method...will, if perservered with, bring us in the end to a deeper and a fuller truth about his people than we could get otherwise. And it never does. Those people remain wraiths blown at random through fog by winds of myth. The revelation remains just a series of horror stories that are essentially false - false because they happen to grotesques who have no psychology, no necessary motivation as what they have become out of what they were. They are also the targets of a fiercely rhetorical bombast diffused through the brilliant technique that promises us everything and gives us nothing, leaving them just wraiths. Meanwhile the talent for serious fiction shown in Sartoris and the rich comic intelligence grudgingly displayed from time to time, especially in Sanctuary, have been allowed to atrophy from disuse and have been covered deep by a tide of sensibility.[4]

The abstract on Faulkner in Literary History of the United States compiled by an impressive list of editors, reiterates a similar opinion:

> Those who praise Faulkner indiscriminately, Sanctuary as well as The Sound and the Fury, are in a sense unaware of how good Faulkner can be, and to what degree the history of this remarkable talent is also the history of its dissipation. The increasing stress on technical virtuosity, the sacrifice of content for effect, and of effect for shock - these, too show the destructive element at work.[5]

Other American critics simply found Faulkner's novels so lacking

in content that the works are weakened by it. Philip Rice seems to admire Faulkner; in fact, he believes that Faulkner is one of the few American authors who can be compared to the best European writers of the same period, but "Mann and Joyce are bulky at least partly because they have something of consequence to say, while Mrs. Woolf's work appears slighter and Faulkner's tangential because their virtues reside almost wholly in the saying."[6] Hartwick contends that, "To Faulkner the novel is a problem in art and fictional strategy, rather than a transfiguration of wisdom. He cultivates, not so much the inherent values of action of character, as their expression."[7]

Alfred Kazin has addressed himself to this problem at some length. He suggests that Faulkner's obscurity is a result of lack of direction:

> Faulkner's "persistent offering of obstacles, a calculated system of screems and obtrusions, of confusions and ambiguous interpolations and delays," seems to spring from an obscure and profligate confusion, a manifest absence of purpose, rather than from an elaborate coherent aim.[8]

He finds that Faulkner's form has often been mistaken for content:

> ...Faulkner's fluency, even his astounding fecundity, has been such that it is almost impossible not to take his improvisations for social philosophy, his turgidity for complexity, and even his passivity for a wise and reflective detachment. It is not strange that he has appeared to be all things to all men....[9]

Yet the form never does relate sufficiently to the content for Kazin:

> For what one always feels in even Faulkner's greatest moments is not a lack or falsity of achievement; it is a power almost grotesque in its lack of relation to the situation or characters; it is a greatness moving in a void.[10]

The French critics had very little to say on this matter. A very early and quite critical article in Le Mois by an anonymous reviewer notes Faulkner's attention to form:

> D'autre part, le problème de la forme le préoccupe constamment. Chacun de ses romans est une nouvelle expérience de style, une création ex nihilo. Il est sans cesse à la recherche de nouveaux procédés, il essaye des moyens inconnus, invente des formes.[11]

But French critics did not expect American writers to be philosophers and, in general, they were not disappointed by this situation. Having an abundance of ideas and opinions in their own literary tradition, the French found novels of intense action and vitality a refreshing change. Nor did they find complexity of form a drawback. But occasionally comments are made to the effect that Faulkner was not an insightful thinker. Jean-Jacques Mayoux makes such a comment. "Faulkner n'est pas un philosophe....Dans la mesure où l'on peut parler de la pensée de Faulkner, cette pensée est confuse, fumeuse, embrouillée, contradictoire..."[12]

There were, however, defender's of Faulkner formalism on both sides of the Atlantic. Some, such as Breit, not only find Faulkner's form admirable, he thinks there is more content than critics have given him credit for:

> For sheer virtuosity in prose Faulkner has no American rival since Melville and James....And though this is admirable, it has contributed to a distorted image of Faulkner by giving emphasis to his virtuoso style, just as the extreme Marxists criticism of the Thirties put him in an improper focus by giving emphasis to his cruel content. There is, of course, more to Faulkner's prose than brilliant architectonics, as there is more to his content than violence.[13]

A common refrain among Faulkner's defenders is that, in fact, form and content cannot be separated and that, therefore, one is as rich as the other. Conrad Aiken takes such a position:

> For, like the great predecessor whom at least in this regard he so oddly resembles, Mr. Faulkner could say with Henry James that it is practically impossible to make any real distinction between theme and form. What immoderately delights him...and what sets him above -

> shall we say it firmly - all his American contemporaries is his continuous preoccupation with the novel as form....[14]

Olga Westland Vickery takes a similar position concluding that, "As I Lay Dying seems to be the one novel in which the author is in full control of his material. As a result it is an organic unit. The form is the content...."[15] David Garnett, an English critic, also defends Faulkner on this basis:

> Form and subject can scarcely be separated in the art of the story-teller who has conceived his tale not as a communication of facts but of emotion. So...nothing is more useless or beside the point than to complain of an author's methods of telling a story and then praise him for something else.[16]

Burnham admits that Faulkner's form has not reached maturity, but he still finds the criticism of Faulkner unwarranted:

> It is undoubtedly true that Faulkner's technique is still experimental, that he has not yet assimilated the methods he is working out. Yet I cannot believe, as has been charged against him, that he is interested in technique for its own sake or that he is obscure that he may appear profound. There is no reason why literature shouldn't be difficult; but the truth is many of the difficulties in Faulkner come from a refusal to read carefully what is there.[17]

The French critics, again, have less to say than the American, on this subject, but they have recognized the problem. Sartre, for one, believes that philosophy and technique are inextricable:

> On aurait tort de prendre ces anomalies pour des exercices gratuits de virtuosité: une technique romanesque renvoie toujours à la métaphysique du romancier. La tâche de critique est de dégager celle-ci avant d'apprécier celle-là. Or, il saute aux yeux que la métaphysique de Faulkner est une métaphysique du temps.[18]

Coindreau takes a different and refreshing approach. He is not perturbed by the lack of thought nor by the melodramatic plot, because of the excellence of Faulkner's technique:

> Il est certain que, réduit à l'intrigue seule, Sanctuary n'est qu'un roman policier pimenté d'érotisme pervers. Mais dans les oeuvres de William Faulkner le sujet n'est qu'un prétexte au déploiement d'une technique qui, ici, touche à la perfection.[19]

In spite of these defenders, it is clear that Faulkner's concern with form was one of the strongest reservations which American critics had about him. The majority approved neither of his general interest in form nor of the innovative and experimental manifestation which this interest took. Many qualified their reservations, however, so that what they really objected to was the importance of form to the exclusion of content. Some found Faulkner's work too intellectually slight to deserve study, but most seem to object on the ground that there was no social value to Faulkner's work. This is almost exclusively an American concern, for French critics readily accepted Faulkner without searching for any moral intent behind the work. But it is clear that many American critics were unable to accept Faulkner in this light. In order to approve of Faulkner, American critics, as a group, found it essential to justify him on the basis of his content - to prove that his work was socially valuable. The effort to find social or moral value in Faulkner's work did not really begin until the forties; in fact the very first article to perceive Faulkner in this light appeared in 1939.[20] By this time criticism of Faulkner for his form and for his immorality were fully developed: nothing substantial remained to be said on the subject. But 1939 marked the beginning of a reappraisal of Faulkner in America. Deeper probing into Faulkner's content revealed certain concerns which had not been readily apparent to American critics, but after their discovery and development, they led the way to Faulkner's acceptance as a moral and ethical writer.

PART II: Content

## CHAPTER FOUR: MORALITY IN FAULKNER'S WORK

### FAULKNER'S SUBJECT MATTER AS IMMORAL

Faulkner was criticized by American critics even more for his content than for his technique. The general consensus was that elements of his subject matter, such as rape, death, suicide, and idiocy, were unacceptable. Not all of these critics, by any means, speak of Faulkner's work as "immoral," but the implication that his choice of subject matter is irresponsible and ignores his social obligations as a writer is often thinly disguised under other accusations. Most of these critics would permit Faulkner his subject matter, if he would use it to make an ethical or philosophical point, but the early American criticism found nothing but gratuitous sensationalism in Faulkner's content.

Many American critics perceived Faulkner, not as an isolated example, but rather as part of a "cult of cruelty" or "school or cruelty" which included such other authors as Erskine Caldwell and Robinson Jeffers. This segment of critics generally seems to have viewed this "school" of literature as part of a gradual decline in the morals and aesthetics of literature since the First World War; most saw it as a trend which would ultimately undermine and destroy literature as they understood it.

Perhaps this attitude, which is so conspicuously absent from French criticism, can ultimately be attributed to the strength of American "puritanism" even in the twentieth century, but ostensibly at least the sources are more varied. Critics with a dogmatically religious outlook comprise part of this group, but there are also many who denounce Faulkner

on the basis of political dogma. Communism had considerable influence over American criticism in the thirties, and many who were not avowed Communists still felt that literature should fulfill a certain social obligation. What is perhaps more curious is that it is nearly impossible to tell from an article whether a critic is arguing from a political or religious point of view: both end by making the same criticism - Faulkner's work lacks an ethical focus. And so these two seemingly incongruous groups are lumped together.

Some of the moralistic attitude toward Faulkner is indirect, such as references to Caddy as a "prostitute"[1] and "an amateur harlot,"[2] or to Quentin's "sordid association with the young Italian girl."[3] Some critics, such as Cowley[4] and Kazin speak of Faulkner's lack of taste rather than his immorality. Alfred Kazin feels that the duel between Charles and Henry in Absalom, Absalom!:

> ...suggests an element of protruding bad taste, often mere carelessness or indifference extending itself into vulgarity; and it suggests what almost every reader of Faulkner must feel at one time or another: his inability to choose between Dostoevsky and Hollywood Boulevard.[5]

McCole finds that in The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner, "makes a generous display not only of his disgusting lack of taste, but also of a lack of artistic ability, when he employs many of the methods of that literary impostor, James Joyce."[6]

One of the most common accusations against Faulkner is that he is deliberately sensationalistic. Kronenberger remarks that, "Faulkner is a master of sensation, the more lurid the sensation the better, and can throw marvelously strange lights over any scene he selects."[7] Camille McCole is even more critical:

By a form of literary charlatanism which consists in

> substituting violent morbidity and septic sensationalism for genuine creative ability, he has pushed himself to a point where one critic calls him "the most discussed author of the day"....nothing but the deliberate use of the grotesque can account for the phenomenal rise of this man from the dullest mediocrity.[8]

Faulkner himself gave a great deal of ammunition to his antagonists in the preface he wrote for Sanctuary. In it he said:

> I began to think of books in terms of possible money. I decided that I might just as well make some of it myself. I took a little time out, and speculated what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends, chose what I thought to be current trends, and invented the most horrific tale I would imagine and wrote it in about three weeks.[9]

This statement illicited considerable reaction. McCole[10] and Hatcher[11] are both critical of Faulkner's sensationalistic intent, and A. Wigfall Green declares:

> While Faulkner was postmaster at the University of Mississippi, he declared that he would write a novel so repulsive that it would be barred from the mails. Sanctuary, the most nauseous novel in the language, signally carried out this threat.[12]

Other American critics attacked Faulkner for the gratuitous cruelty in his novels. Harry Hartwick prefers Robinson Jeffers, a name which is mentioned quite frequently in this context, to Faulkner, for Hartwick finds that:

> ...Jeffer's deeds of crime, perversion, and sadism are symbols that lift us above the deed, while Faulkner's never transcend the level of bare perception. There is nothing, we feel, behind his atrocities, no cosmic echo; each gamy detail exists for itself alone, and seems to be designed more to "thrill" the reader than to awaken his conceptual faculties.[13]

Thompson makes no distinction between Jeffers and Faulkner, but he equivocates about whether Faulkner is "cruel" or "immoral":

> If the meaning of immorality be limited to the incitement to sexual conduct contrary to law or religion, I should agree [that Faulkner is not immoral], since neither

> Mr. Faulkner nor Mr. Jeffers makes such conduct in any way attractive. At the same time, I might add, the word should not be so limited, and in my opinion nothing is more immoral, because more destructive of civilization, than cruelty.[14]

Harlin Hatcher contends that Faulkner has reached the "ultimate extension" of cruelty in literature:

> The work that William Faulkner has so far done now appears to be the end of one era rather than the beginning of a new. In an age inured to horror and indifference through repetition to the cruelty and the crudity of decadent people, he has succeeded in extending their potency for shock.... And he defines the farthest limits to which the innovation and revolts that were at one time necessary to the continued well-being of our literature can be carried without final self-defeat.[15]

Several others speak of Faulkner as if he were a member of a highly organized and subversive group, who call themselves the "school for cruelty." Ima Herron makes a typical comment:

> In the next and matured period of his writings Faulkner repeatedly struck at the fundamental morality of our literature....The Sound and the Fury (1929), As I Lay Dying (1930), Sanctuary (1931), and Light in August (1932), together with certain shorter stories, established Faulkner as a sort of high priest in the "school of cruelty"....[16]

Camille McCole makes several references to Faulkner which implies that Faulkner is head of and responsible for this "school of cruelty." First, McCole argues against those who contend that the violence in Faulkner is no different from that of classical tragedy:

> To the proponents of this type of literature we must suggest that in all truly great tragic works of art in which cruelty is the theme, there is a significant difference of selection and effect. In the first place, the cruelty is never deliberate or forced as it is in the work of Faulkner and his school. We never feel that it has been introduced merely to shock us. So natural does the motif seem in the trilogy of Aeschylus that the cathartic value of the plays would have been completely satisfying even if the Greeks had not taken

> the further precaution of avoiding the actual portrayal of the murder or cruelty upon the stage.17

McCole also bemoans the influence of writers such as Faulkner:

> As we have already suggested, the most vicious aspect of such writing is the fact that it is part of a cult that bids fair to complete that brutification so dangerous to moral sensibilities. Faulkner is but the head of a vicious school....For, apart from the serious aesthetic defects of this writing there is an ethical one which we cannot ignore: Such work actually hardens a reader. And now, perhaps as never before, we are seeing the effects of it around us.18

McCole concludes that such influence should be strongly resisted:

> Let us leave these purveyors of violence and cruelty and lust and shadowy products of literary nightmares. Let us ignore their imbeciles, idiots and cretins. And let us, instead, turn our attention toward fiction that gives us men who are real creatures of a real world - men who look upwards and stand straight and tall against the sky....Perhaps we had better keep our minds locked against such mad marauders? We certainly should!

A number of critics seem to be somewhat uncomfortable in their attack on Faulkner, for they mention that no subject is intrinsically unacceptable for fiction. They tend to say this is such a patterned phrase that one suspects they remember it from a course on appreciation of literature, and therefore feel they must give it lip service. As though they feel guilty to ignore such a sacrosanct doctrine, each acknowledges its validity, but still finds excuses for condemning Faulkner. Ward feels that it is a matter of aesthetics:

> What is material for the pathologist is not necessarily ruled out as material for the novelist....But pathology in literature has to be justified according to aesthetic standards, not medical ones; and the pathological factor in William Faulkner's books is not transmuted.20

Granville Hicks begins, very open-mindedly, by saying:

> Can we not take it for granted that there is no subject that is inherently and inevitably unsuited for fiction?

> That should be easy to do if we recall the subjects of Greek tragedy: Clytemnestra's bloody murder of her husband, Electra's fierce revenge, Oedipus's double crime...[21]

But only two pages later, Hicks suggests that Faulkner is following in the footsteps of Edgar Allen Poe and Ambrose Bierce and concludes that, "this is not the most healthy, the most fruitful tradition for a young writer to ally himself with."[22]

Alan R. Thompson, on the other hand, feels that Hicks "is too ready to disregard objections to Mr. Faulkner's subjects,"[23] but he expresses something of the same quandary:

> An author is free to choose his subject; but readers are free not to read him if he chooses the depths of degeneracy and evil, and presents them not only without the softening effect of idealization but with an obvious desire to exploit the last nervous thrill to be got from a complete concrete visualization of every detail.[24]

The most common criticism, it would seem, is that Faulkner's work lacks any ethical focus. Chamberlain feels that this is all that Faulkner lacks. "If he would court the realm of moral ideas, he might give us such dramatic fiction as would put him in a class by himself in American fiction."[25] Harry Hartwick suggests that a moral significance would give greater meaning to Faulkner novels:

> His stories treat of death only as death, not as a phenomenon with universal overtones: and the incidents of his novels have no moral momentum for carrying them over from the concrete into the abstract, from fact into symbol.[26]

Philip Henderson, and English critic, finds Erskine Caldwell preferable to Faulkner because of Caldwell's greater social consciousness; that is, Caldewell "shows us why his agricultural morons are as they are and indicates how their individual helplessness can be remedied."[27] Delmore Schwartz comments on the contrast between Shakespeare's and Faulkner's

use of the phrase, "the sound and the fury," and feels that the moral intent behind the phrase is very different in each case:

> No author has more right than Faulkner to the much-used lines in Macbeth about the tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. In Shakespeare, however, this view of Life is uttered by a murderer virtually at the end of his rope; not by the author. In Faulkner, signifying nothing signifies all, it is the ultimate revelation.[28]

Thompson is one of the most adamant in his denunciation of Faulkner's content. He claims that he rejects Faulkner on aesthetic rather than moral grounds. He explains by saying:

> Mr. Faulkner has failed to transmute the raw material of life in such a way as to give them, as readers, a purely aesthetic effect....Emotional effects which approximate the "actual" experience of lust or cruelty are inartistic. They destroy all detachment and make the proper aesthetic attitude impossible.[29]

However, in another article his judgement is so moralistic as to belie Thompson's statement about his purely aesthetic concern:

> There are esthetes who are so fascinated by such virtuosity that they can ignore ordinary prejudices; some even take pride in doing so....If any theory of esthetics leads to justification of such a book as this, he [the reader] is tempted to say, better send theory to the devil and join the naïve majority who feel that the novelist should practice somewhat the same restraint in his imagination as is expected of him in his conduct.[30]

Grenville Vernon is also harsh with Faulkner. He finds that American critics have been much too forgiving of Faulkner's subjects:

> If literature, and Faulkner is often literature, has ever descended to fouler morasses than in many of these stories, it has never done so in the Anglo-Saxon world. But what is most discouraging is the fact that American critical rebuke, when it has occurred at all, has been spineless and even apologetic.[31]

A sizeable group of American critics attacked Faulkner, not for the "immorality" of his work, but for its one-sidedness - his obsession with evil, morbidness, pessimism, etc. In all of this body of criticism

the implication is, and sometimes it is made explicit, that Faulkner's defect is lack of realism. This rests on two assumptions: 1) that Faulkner is not presenting an accurate picture of Yoknapatawpha County and 2) that he should be; only realism is a defensible subject. Frohock notes that Faulkner came under the attack of American critics because his work did not coincide with their conception of "realistic" writing. As he comments:

> A hundred years of realism have marked us indelibly. We ask instinctively of any piece of fiction - or any work of art for that matter - "Is it true?" We tend to judge it as we would a piece of journalism, and are undisturbed by the inconsistency of asking that a fiction should read as if it were not a fiction.[32]

Granville Hicks is critical that Faulkner does not approach his matter with the eye of a sociologist:

> Nothing but crime and insanity will satisfy him. If he tried to see why life is horrible, he might be willing to give a more representative description of life, might be willing to occupy himself with the kind of crime that is committed every day....
> But Faulkner is not primarily interested in showing how people live in the South, and why they live as they do. Passages in As I Lay Dying and Light in August reveal a fine talent for realistic description of contemporary life. Faulkner has not only watched the people of the South carefully; he is one of them and he knows them from the inside. But he will not write simply and realistically of southern life. He is not primarily interested in representative men and women; certainly he is not interested in the forces that have shaped them.[33]

H.S. Canby is critical because he feels the "hysteria" and "sadism" of Faulkner's work presents a one-sided and slanderous picture of America.[34] Several critics comment that Faulkner's lack of realism limits the importance of his work. Harold Strauss is one such critic. "These novels [those preceding Light in August] were isolated nightmares of the subconscious which tore themselves loose from the world of common

reality, and therefore were limited in significance."[35] J.D. Adams contends that the lack of normal people and normal relationships makes Faulkner's work unrealistic, a term which he uses as a criticism.[36] He also feels that the imbalance of interest in evil makes Faulkner's work meaningless, "Faulkner's work is fundamentally meaningless because there is no interaction in it between good and evil, to the end that the mystery of human life is absent from his writing."[37] Harry Hartwick echoes Adams' contention that good and evil must be balanced:

> In the truly great novel, whether gentle or tragic, goodness and evil use each other as sounding boards, reflect significance upon each other, and produce a third element, that sense of life's wonder, which marks all authentic literature and evokes a variety of religious awe in the reader. But in Faulkner's circumscribed world of sensation, evil goes round and round with its tail in its mouth; and as a result, his books lack what might be termed "spiritual resonance."[38]

Campbell, too, feels that Faulkner's work would have benefitted by a greater range. "Faulkner might have portrayed his degenerate characters more effectively if, like Dostoievski, he had introduced enough normal characters to make a striking contrast."[39] William Troy voices a similar criticism, but finds the defect also has some benefits:

> T.S. Eliot refers somewhere to the mark of the great poet as the ability to understand and communicate "the essential strength and weakness of the human soul." For most readers Mr. Faulkner will fail of this mark through giving us too much of the weakness and not nearly enough of the strength. Unquestionably, his book [Absalom, Absalom!] will suffer from the limitations of his vision. But there is also no question that it owes most of its astonishing qualities to these same limitations. It possesses the awful impressiveness that comes from exhausting any attitude or vision, however wrong and one-sided, of its last measure of intensity.[40]

This kind of criticism is almost entirely absent from the French press. There are a few exceptions, however. An article in Le Mois, which seems to have been greatly influenced by English criticism, remarks that,

"M. W. Faulkner...traite presque exclusivement des sujets horribles; ses héros sont des malades, des fous et des brutes."[41] The same article describes the limited nature of Faulkner's subject matter at greater length:

> Malgré la grande complexité de l'oeuvre de Faulkner, elle possède une homogénéité: tous les sujets sont également horribles. La mort est toujours le centre et le pivot de l'action; les héros souffrent d'une manière aussi atroce qu'injuste. Le fond même de l'existence est une souffrance sans raison et sans expiation. L'auteur ne connaît que deux espèces d'hommes: les bourreaux et les victimes....[42]

Marcel Arland implies that the sensational intent of Sanctuary makes it one of Faulkner's weaker novels; "Il est construit autour d'un fait-divers assez scabreux, qui risquait de ne donner à cette gageure qu'un succès de scandale."[43] And Brion suggests that a greater range of subjects would be an asset to Faulkner:

> Cette complaisance pour le démoniaque et le monstrueux ne laisse pas, d'ailleurs, d'êtres lassante, et l'outrance qu'apporte Faulkner dans cette évocation de l'ignoble pourrait, à la longue, apparaître comme un procédé. Nous souhaiterions, en tous cas, une vision moins limitée de l'humain, et une moins constante obsession de l'inhumaine dans l'humain.[44]

But even these few comments do not approach the vehemence of American denunciation of Faulkner's content. It would seem that the French critics, for many reasons, are not very concerned with the moral intent of Faulkner's work. Either they do not believe that there is a lack of ethics here or they do not find it a disadvantage. In fact, later discussion will show that the French critics were divided on this issue, but they generally followed one or the other of the above arguments. In addition to showing less concern with Faulkner's morals, it appears that politics played less of a role in French criticism than in American criticism for the same period. Stanley Woodworth contends that it is not until 1949 or 1950 that Marxism and Communism began to effect criticism

in France as it had in America.[45]

THE PESSIMISM AND VIOLENCE OF FAULKNER'S WORK AS HONEST AND VITAL.

Some critics, particularly among the French, find that the seemingly amoral quality of Faulkner's work is no disadvantage: it only indicates the frank honesty of the author. Malraux and Coindreau may have made acceptance of Faulkner's work in France easier because of their early, favorable articles. Malraux argued in his preface of Sanctuaire that Faulkner was exploring evil and fatality rather than specific characters or situations;[46] and Coindreau contended that the plot of Sanctuary was unimportant compared to the technique and atmosphere Faulkner uses.[47]

From these early justifications it was only a short step to arguing that Faulkner's work was uncommonly frank and honest. Saint Jean describes Faulkner by saying:

> Ah! n'attendez pas un écrivain bien élevé, ou vague, ou qui pense jamais à vos petites susceptibilités. La brutalité des descriptions, la grossièreté des injures ou des images et un mépris frequent de l'art de la construction peuvent nous choquer, mais ne proviennent jamais d'un calcul ou d'une faiblesse de caractère.[48]

Coindreau describes Faulkner's work in somewhat similar terms:

> La première partie du roman de William Faulkner [The Sound and the Fury] est, elle aussi, contée par un idiot, le livre entier vivre de bruit et de fureur et semblera démié de signification à ceux qui estiment que l'homme de lettres, chaque fois qu'il prend la plume, doit apporter un message ou servir quelque noble cause. W. Faulkner se contente d'ouvrir les portes de l'enfer. Il ne force personne à l'accompagner, mais ceux qui lui font confiance n'ont pas lieu de le regretter.[49]

It is perhaps ironic that these French critics are essentially praising Faulkner for the realism of his work, just as the American critics found this same quality unrealistic and condemned him for it. Dabit implies that Faulkner's honesty is "realistic":

> Sanctuaire ne nous fait confident d'aucune problème esthétique ou moral. Il nous délivre des preoccupations auxquel-

> les nous accoutument tant de romans français. Nous n'y reconnaissons point un souci de perfection ou de bien dire, de violences verbales ou de divagations faciles. Non. Nous tenons des êtres de chair....Tous sont pleinement dans la vie....[50]

Ehrenbourg, a Marxist critic appearing in the French press, contends that Faulkner wrote as a social critic:

> Je considère comme irraisonnables et injustes les accusations impitoyables qui sont formulées à l'égard de Faulkner, car le pessimisme sans issue qui est propre à cet écrivain est dicté non pas par une mode littéraire ou par une quelconque perfidie, mais par l'espace sans air, par l'étouffement, par le milieu, la société, ses normes, son obscurantisme.
> Vraiment, un tel pessimisme est cent fois plus honnête que l'optimisme....[51]

Jacques Duesberg takes a very different approach to Faulkner's work, but he, too, feels that Faulkner's work is characterized by its honesty. Duesberg finds it unjust that Faulkner has been attacked for not proposing social changes as many of his American contemporaries did. Instead, "Faulkner reste donc un artiste pur, dégagé de toute ambition de servir: son alchimie verbale n'élabore, pour ses contemporains, nul 'secret pour changer la vie'."[52]

Charles Glicksberg is one of very few American critics to argue along these lines. He contends that, "Faulkner is no moralist. Holding no brief for any ethical standard, he refuses to sit in judgement of the life of man."[53] Glicksberg replies to those who find Faulkner immoral:

> Such objection on moralistic grounds will not, however, carry weight - Faulkner is primarily concerned to tell the truth as objectively and effectively as he can within the limits of fiction, without compromising his integrity or vision.[54]

FAULKNER'S SUBJECT MATTER AS ETHICAL

Today, with the advantage of several decades of perspective on the subject, it is almost humorous to find critics so sharply and vehemently

divided on the issue of Faulkner's morality. Today it is difficult to understand why critics considered the issue so critical and why there was so little consensus. Alfred Kazin has suggested that Faulkner's tone is so suggestive and evocative, "that it has been possible to read every point of view into his work and to prove them all."[55] Even in an author who does not make his own point of view explicit - an author who demands that the reader reconstruct the plot and reach his own conclusions - it seems surprizing that Faulkner could have been so misunderstood by early critics. But clearly there was a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion. Joseph Warren Beach voices his uncertainty on the subject:

> One is never quite sure, indeed, whether the emphasis should rest on the idealism or on the morbidity; for it is never clear to what extent the author's sympathy goes with the exponents of idealism, and to what extent he means to represent them as fools and degenerates.[56]

a) Faulkner as Traditional Moralist

In America the breakthrough began in 1939 when George O'Donnell said, "William Faulkner is really a traditional moralist, in the best sense...."[57] O'Donnell argued that Faulkner was really writing history as myth, using the South as his example. As O'Donnell perceived it, Faulkner was primarily concerned with the destruction of the traditional forces of the old South. This conflict is enacted in Faulkner's work between the Sartoris family, or Southern aristocracy, and the Snopeses, or the upwardly-mobile poor whites. O'Donnell explains the nature of this conflict:

> It is a universal conflict. The Sartorises act traditionally; that is to say, they act always with an ethically responsible will. They represent vital morality, humanism. Being anti-traditional, the Snopeses are immoral from the Sartoris point-of-view. But the Snopeses do not recognize this point-of-view; acting only for self-interest, they acknowledge no ethical duty. Really,

> then, they are amoral; they represent naturalism or animalism. And the Sartoris-Snopes conflict is fundamentally a struggle between humanism and naturalism.[58]

O'Donnell felt that the Snopeses weakened the Sartorises by making "them self-conscious, queer, psychologically tortured."[59] The Sartorises had undermined themselves by codifying their morality, for when traditional ethics are formalized they cease to be vital.[60] O'Donnell also felt that Faulkner recognized that the old Southern order had been undermined by defects inherent in the system: abuse of the land through stealing, buying and selling, and abuse of man through slavery.[61] Not everyone agreed with O'Donnell's analysis[62] and O'Donnell did make some errors in judgement,[63] but his insight was extremely important to the criticism which followed it. This article actually had more influence on those who were interested in Faulkner as an historian, social critic, or myth-maker, than on those who were interested in investigating his morality. But O'Donnell's article pointed out the possibility that Faulkner was writing from an ethical point of view in his novels.

Faulkner had some other defenders as well, though none so influential as O'Donnell. Beck denies charges that Faulkner is gratuitously sensational:

> If Faulkner were only the sensationalist he is so often accused of being, then he would be a most vicious pander, procurer of his own kin. However, an unprejudiced and careful reading of his entire work may be expected to reveal his deep knowledge of his subject, his rationality and detachment, his moral awareness and his uncompromising opposition to evil.[64]

Among the French critics, Jean-Jacques Mayoux says of Absalom, Absalom!, "la vision de Faulkner est profondement éthique, ce que l'on méconnaît trop souvent."[65]

Most critics who felt that Faulkner was a moralist argued that he

was either an idealist or a puritan, and most critics speak of one or the other, but not both. However, to a certain extent Faulkner's idealism and his puritanism are interconnected and therefore difficult to separate. Brodin, for instance, cites as Faulkner's two essential traits, "son puritanisme et son idéalisme."[66] For the purposes of this paper, however, we will treat them separately.

b) Faulkner as Idealist

As Henri Peyre[67] and others have noted, American literature is often characterized by a pessimism which is the outgrowth of frustrated idealism. Charly Guyot says precisely this: "Le pessimisme de Faulkner est né d'un idéalisme déçu."[68] Malcolm Cowley commented at some length on Faulkner's idealism:

> In addition to being a fatalist, Faulkner is also an idealist, more strongly so than any other American writer of our time. The idealism disguises itself as its own opposite, but that is because he is deeply impressed by and tends to exaggerate the contrast between the life around him and the ideal picture in his mind.... And both pictures [the ideal and the real] are not only physical but moral; for always in the background of his novels is a sense of moral standards and a feeling of outrage at their being violated or simply pushed aside.[69]

Cowley believes that it is this despair at the present which makes Faulkner turn to the past. "Seeing little hope in the future, he turn to the past, where he hopes to discover a legendary and recurrent pattern that will illuminate and lend dignity to the world about him."[70] Robert Penn Warren also comments on Faulkner's ethics and his use of the past:

> When it is said, as it is often said, that Faulkner's work is "backward-looking," the answer is that the constant ethical center is to be found in the glorification of the human effort and of human endurance, which are not in time,...."[71]

c) Faulkner as Puritan

The bulk of criticism contending that Faulkner is a moralist proposes

that Faulkner is a puritan in the Calvinist tradition. Apparently this quality was recognized on both sides of the Atlantic independently, though the Americans do not always call it puritanism. The French critics were aware of it much earlier and wrote about it at greater length than the American critics. Maurice Coindreau, in his 1931 article, presented the view that Faulkner was in fact a puritan and other French critics were quick to elaborate and explore the possibilities.

Faulkner's own attitude toward puritanism is somewhat ambivalent. Many do not question this relationship, some assume that Faulkner is staunchly Calvinistic, while others perceive an ambivalence. Stephen Spender suggests that Faulkner, like Henry James was a "puritan who did not believe in the puritan morality."[72] Charly Guyot notes:

> Plus clairement que dans ses autres oeuvres, l'auteur révèle ici [Lumière d'août] le fond puritain de sa pensée. Non qu'il approuve le comportement d'un McEachern ou d'un Doc Hines. Il ne nous donne pas ces deux personnages pour des modèles....73

It is clear, however, that Faulkner's work is infused with puritanism. Coindreau remarks that the excesses in Faulkner's work are those of a puritan, "On lui reproche parfois la morbidité....Il emploie pour sa peinture des couleurs fort crues; mais c'est beaucoup moins par sa perversité que par puritanisme."[74] Marcel Arland makes a similar comment:

> Il y a chez William Faulkner, en même temps qu'un romancier, un moraliste et un visionnaire....On n'y voit guère que meurtres, lâcheté, mensonge, luxure, sadisme, folie; mais elle n'est jamais basse, jamais malpropre. Dira-t-on qu'elle est morale? Elle l'est de la singulière façon dont un puritanisme de race se plaît à signaler toutes les déchéances et les exactions, et d'abord celles qui viennent d'une morale puritaine.75

The fatality or destiny, previously discussed, has been seen by some as Calvinistic. Some, such as Pouillon, denied that Faulkner's

fatality was deterministic, but Soulac comments on the puritanism of Faulkner's sense of destiny:

> Cette Fatalité qui s'acharne contre nous n'est-elle pas une incarnation du Dieu implacable du Puritanisme...? S'il y a un auteur qu'evoque pour moi le romancier américain, malgré l'abîme que les siècles ont creusé entre eux, c'est Bunyon; la terreur panique qui conduit Christian sur les chemins de sa progression, est celle aussi qui pousse les héros de Faulkner vers la cendre et les flammes de leur damnations.76

Henry Seidel Canby also feel that the use of destiny in Light in August has religious origins, but he cites the southern Fundamentalists rather than speaking of puritanism:

> I think that Faulkner, like the revivalist preachers, overdoes his fantasy. I think that his analysis of destiny crushing the unfortunate and yet not letting the sparrow fall is adulterated by the romanticism of the Fundamentalist preachers he listened to in his youth. This is in a curious fashion a Methodist book.77

Le Breton finds the protagonists' desire for expiation of their sins, in The Wild Palms, to be very puritanical:

> Si différents que semblent à première vue ces thèmes, il se touchent néanmoins au dénouement, car c'est chez le docteur comme chez le forçat un obscur sentiment de l'expiation nécessaire qui les empêche, le premier de se suicider, l'autre de demeurer libre. Les lecteurs de Faulkner se plairont à reconnaître là la note puritaine si caractéristique de l'auteur et qui n'exclut nullement l'expression colorée et violente des idées les plus hardies et la description la plus précise des réalités de la vie.78

A number of French critics contend that hatred is the logical outgrowth of puritanism. Coindreau makes such a comment:

> Puritanisme. Source de fanatisme et, par suite, la meilleure école de haine. Cette haine est toujours latente dans les ouvrages de William Faulkner, et elle déborde de toutes les pages de Light in August....Leur Dieu est un dieu de colère, de vengeance et de haine....79

Emié makes a very similar remark:

> Si l'on admet, en effet, que le puritanisme doit logiquement

> engendrer le fanatisme et ce dernier engendrer à son tour la haine, Faulkner est assurément le plus puritain des romanciers d'outre-Atlantique pour la seule et unique raison que son oeuvre, et Lumière d'août en premier lieu, ne nous épargne aucun des débordements du fanatisme et ne néglige aucun effet susceptible d'ajouter à l'horreur et au tragique de ces débordements.[80]

Faulkner's treatment of evil has also been perceived as an outgrowth of puritanism. Evil as a tangible force is extremely rare in twentieth-century American literature, yet it plays a very important role in Faulkner's work. It is a quality which recalls the puritan writers of earlier periods. Wyndham Lewis speaks of Faulkner as "a Calvinist moralist" concerned with evil and violence."[81] Frohock also comments on the connection between violence and evil. He believes that evil in Faulkner is omnipresent and tangible, and that the symptom of this evil, as for the Greeks, is violence. Evil comes from the past and hence, though it can be resisted it cannot be controlled.[82]

It is primarily American critics who noticed and commented on this quality, perhaps because evil as a force was rarer in contemporary American literature than it was in European literature. But whatever the reasons were, the American comments are quite numerous. Paterson notes that Faulkner

> ...is a Manichean. To him the principle of evil exists of itself. This conviction not merely of sin or guilt but of a dualistic spiritual universe is what lends force to his talent.[83]

John Wilson comments that, "...it is concern with the problem of evil that seems to be uppermost with Faulkner."[84] Warren Beck remarks that those who criticize Faulkner refuse to recognize the evil which exists in the world, but Faulkner confronts it directly.[85]

Certain American critics readily accepted Faulkner's attitude toward

evil as moral, that is, Faulkner's sympathies were not with evil nor was the evil in his novels gratuitous. As Beck says, "...Faulkner's deep pessimism does not proceed from a denial of values but from a melancholy recognition of the great weight of evil opposition to very real values."[86]

Perhaps the most striking indication of puritanism in Faulkner's work is the attitude towards sex in his novels. The French critics perceived this quality immediately and it is commented upon frequently in French criticism, but the American critics, independently it seems, realized it as well. The French public and critics were made aware of Faulkner's puritanism by Coindreau in his early article on Faulkner. Coindreau realized that, "L'acte sexuel, dans l'oeuvre de William Faulkner, est toujours décrit comme une operation bestiale, répugnante ou perverse...."[87] Jean Simon found it surprising that Faulkner could be a puritan, but he came to agree with Coindreau because sexual desire is closely linked with hatred and cruelty in Faulkner's work, disgust at sexual love is evident, and also because of the fatalism, "la Vengeance Divine," previously mentioned.[88] Marcel Arland comments that, "Toute cette oeuvre [Lumière d'août] est hantée par la haine de la femme et de l'amour sexuel...."[89]

The American perception of the situation is not significantly different from the French, except that the link to puritanism is not always made. Alan Thompson, inspite of his assertion of the decadence of Faulkner's work, agrees that Faulkner does not make sex seem appealing.[90] Burnham notes that:

> There is first a very special attitude toward sex, resembling the attitude of several late Elizabethans.... There is that is to say none of the romantic glory, no positive value in sexual relations....[91]

Maxwell Ceismar contends the, "...Faulkner's eroticism is in the end hardly erotic. The underlying view is not sexual, but a distaste for

sex."[92] Geismar links this attitude with what he perceived as Faulkner's hatred for women and Negroes, and concludes that, rather than being puritanism, this borders on fascism. Hopper is one of the few American critics to relate Faulkner's attitude to puritanism. He finds that man is afraid of his animal-like qualities in Faulkner's work and continually seeks to escape from them. It is this quality which makes Faulkner's puritanical tendances clear.[93]

In addition a number of critics, on both sides of the Atlantic, relate Faulkner's work to the Bible. It is clear that Faulkner had a better knowledge of the Bible than most of his contemporary American writers. The interpretation of his use of the Bible is more controversial, however. Vincent Hopper suggests that what Faulkner was trying to do was not unlike what Dante and Milton did, but that the age in which he lived prevented Faulkner from producing a vision of paradise.[94] Parallels have been made, by Colum[95] and others, between Absalom, Absalom! and the Biblical story of King David, Jonathan and Absalom. Powell suggests that Benjy in The Sound and the Fury is Christ symbol, which makes an implicit comment on the society around Benjy.[96]

Among the French critics, Claude-Edmonde Magny finds numerous connections between Faulkner and the Bible. In fact, she feels that the significance of Faulkner's work is beyond what is true and false; it is "au-delà même des catégories esthétiques ordinaires. On pourrait, je crois, la dire avec plus de raisons religieuses...."[97] First, she notes that, "On pense, en lisant Faulkner, à ces grandes généologies bibliques, simples kyrielles de noms de l'Ancien Testament répétés à satiété...."[98] Magny comments on the title Absalom, Absalom! and notes that that novel "évoque le plus le rituel hébraïque de meditation du

passé...."[99] She says of the title Sanctuaire:

> ...je ne vois guère comment, sinon par cette perpétuelle référence des événements contemporains à un contexte sacré qui leur donne leur plein sens, on peut expliquer le titre extravagant de Sanctuaire donné à une histoire sordide à l'extrême....[100]

Magny's most significant point, however, is her all encompassing "métaphysique biblique," which she describes as follows:

> Ainsi l'univers que nous propose Faulkner c'est le monde-d'avant-l'Incarnation, tout entier absorbé dans la contemplation de ce qui fut, occupé à marquer le pas, en scandant inlassablement les fastes de ses gloires révolues. Comment ne paraîtrait-il pas désespéré, puisque l'espoir n'a pas encore lui? Et, tout comme l'Office des Ténèbres à la Résurrection, la Nativité est nécessairement liée au Massacre des Innocents - ces êtres infortunés massacrés contre toute justice qui, dans le monde de Faulkner se nomment Tommy...Goodwin...Christina...Miss Burden... Nancy...Charlotte...
> Peut-être pensera-t-on qu'il est exagéré de chercher à l'oeuvre de Faulkner des substructure à ce point théologiques. Pourtant, tous les critiques n'ont-ils pas été frappés de son "puritanisme," entendant par là le dégoût visible qui le saisit devant le mystère sexuel, en même temps que sa foncière misognynie - comme il est naturel dans un monde où la Vierge Immaculée n'est pas encore venue rétablir l'ordre des choses altérées par Eve?[101]

In summary, the French critics recognized the puritanism and the idealism in Faulkner from the very beginning of criticism in France. In America, on the other hand, criticism in the thirties generally condemned the morality of Faulkner's work, and it was not until the forties that a reappraisal began, which ultimately led to Faulkner's acceptance. This change of attitude was facilitated by more sophisticated criticism, and also because of a certain transition in Faulkner's work. His later work, such as Intruder in the Dust and Go Down, Moses, not only had become technically easier, but the moral and social comment behind the story was no longer difficult to discern. If any critics were still in doubt,

Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech, in 1950, made it impossible to question him any longer. This very brief speech appears to confront directly all of the attacks which American critics made on the morality of Faulkner's work. He denies writing for money or sensationalism and states that instead his intent was to depict noble emotions and universal situations which proclaim the ultimate victory of man.

> I feel that this award was not made to me as a man but to my work - a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust.
> ...the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat. He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed - love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and worst of all without pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.
> Until he relearns these things he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need

> not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.[102]

It is not clear whether the conviction of this speech or the weight of the prize was more influential, but 1950 marks the end of significant criticism against Faulkner's morality in American criticism.

Although the American critics gradually appreciated Faulkner's morality, they never linked him with puritanism to the same extent as the French. To be sure, the French critics quite readily found evidence of puritanism in twentieth century American literature; and, on the other hand, it may be a quality that Americans do not readily recognize or are reluctant to admit in themselves. There is, it would seem, a further paradox, for it seems that a certain modern day puritanism in American criticism largely prevented the early appreciation of Faulkner. At the same time the French critics believed Faulkner to be a puritain. It is clear that Faulkner's "puritanism" and the American critics' "puritanism," if the term can be applied in either case, are entirely different things. The critic, it would seem was limited by a middle class ethic which included obligation to duty and work, and the importance of good taste and refinement. Faulkner's "puritanism", whether filtered through southern Fundamentalism or not, recalls the hell fire and damnation of earlier puritanism. Faulkner's "puritanism", as the French perceived, defined itself by the tangible presence of evil, the importance of fate, and revulsion at sex.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FAULKNER AS A SOUTHERN WRITER

### FAULKNER AS A "REGIONAL" WRITER

It was, of course, immediately apparent that Faulkner was a regional writer: a writer rooted in, and concerned with, the South. After the First World War he travelled little, unlike many of his compatriot writers who were very cosmopolitan in their travels or who became expatriots. Nor was Faulkner's writing, with very few exceptions, concerned with anything but the South. In fact, most of his major work is limited to Yoknapatawpha county, creating a kind of cycle which is very rare in American literature.

All of this was readily apparent to the critic of Faulkner's work, but the implications of this regionalism were not as clear. To some, regionalism was synonymous with provincialism and hence detrimental to any work, while to others regionalism was a positive quality.

a) Faulkner as Part of a Southern Tradition

A certain amount of comment was devoted to Faulkner's role in the tradition of Southern American literature. This criticism was, quite naturally, almost entirely American, since few French critics were aware of any such tradition. In fact, it is probable that most American critics were not well informed about this line of writing. Thus the comments are sparse and somewhat random.

Marshall McLuhan notes that Faulkner, as well as other Southern novelists are basically story-tellers:

> Why had it never occurred to anybody to consider the reason why every Southern novelist is a teller of tales? ...The tale is the form most natural to a people with a passionate historical sense of life. For in a tale, events march on, passing sometimes over and sometimes around human lives.[1]

McLuhan's comment implies the importance of the past in Southern literature, a quality evident in Faulkner. Milton Rugoff felt that, "there is something rancidly nostalgic in the way Mr. Faulkner keeps turning back to a period in the South which has elsewhere in America become only another part of the past."[2] Most American critics, however, seem to have felt that Faulkner had broken with Southern romanticism as it is found in such works as Gone with the Wind. Tom Greet feels that Faulkner's work was, in part, a disillusionment with the romance of the old South.[3] Irene and Allen Cleaton contend that, "Faulkner is the most important of the Southern writers who have fled from the tradition of an aristocratic romanticism."[4] MacLachlan specifies how he believes that Faulkner has reversed this aristocratic tradition:

> One dares to suggest that this formula amounts to an inversion of the Southern scene of fictional tradition. For glorification of the gentry there is substituted here acid regret. Instead of being strong, sure of themselves and lordly, the aristocrats are of all the most pitiable and confused, while genuine nobility and surety are found in negro characters...or in plain white folk.[5]

Spencer suggests that violence and confusion are qualities invariably found in Southern literature:

> Faulkner, Caldwell, and Thomas Wolfe are authentic Southern writers, not so much by reason of their material as by their temper. Violence, the long search, the ironic social joke, the blundering, childlike adult, the casual blasphemy - all are integral in their Southern imagination.[6]

> In Southern fiction...whatever its genre, there seems omnipresent the individual confused or, at times, irrevocably lost between a culture that has died and another unborn.[7]

McIlwaine finds what he considers to be "naturalism" in the Southern literary tradition, and he contends that Faulkner and Caldwell extend this tradition:

> And although this sexual emphasis of Caldwell and Faulkner is the usual one of naturalists and, at the same time, owes much to the sanction of contemporary taste, as well as to the writings of Sherwood Anderson, Masters, and Joyce, it is historically the dramatization of poor-white sexual sins outlined by J.R. Gilmore about seventy years ago in his essay, "The Sum of the Whole."[9]

> ...these Southern naturalists are merely emphasizing a side of poor-white life that has existed both in fact and in literature for two hundred years.[10]

Malcolm Cowley remarks on Faukner's mixing of two American traditions: the gothic tale and "realistic frontier humor with Mark Twain as its best example."[11] The humor in Faulkner's work was less noticeable in his early works, than in the works of the forties, so it was not largely appreciated in the period we are discussing. Humor is a quality in Faulkner which the French were particularly late in appreciating, due probably to the barrier of Southern culture.

b) Faulkner as Part of a Southern Revival

The eminence of such writers of this period as Thomas Wolfe, Erskine Caldwell and Faulkner, as well as the growing self-consciousness of writers and critics such as John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren and Caroline Gordon made it apparent to the critical audience that a Southern "revival" or "renaissance" was in progress during this period. Many American reviewers perceived Faulkner in this light and it influenced their treatment of him. Some simply remark on the popularity of novels "with the decaying South as background."[12] Others group the Southern writers together in their chapters and discussions, as Spencer does.[13] Though there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this approach, it seems,

in retrospect, that this resulted in the continual linking of Faulkner's name with Caldwell's, and the assumption of certain common intentions which often seems to misrepresent Faulkner. In fact, many critics clearly preferred Caldwell to Faulkner. Oscar Cargill considers Caldwell and Faulkner both "primitivists", and he concludes:

> Anse Brundren...is...the prototype of the simple elders of Caldwell's stories, and As I Lay Dying has suggested much to the latter writer. Caldwell, it will be seen, has done better with Faulkner's material than Faulkner himself.[14]

And Carl Van Doren voices a similar opinion. "With stronger nerves than Faulkner, and a much surer art, Caldwell was not feverish or foggy."[15]

c) "Regionalism": Strength or Weakness?

For some, the term "regional writer" has a distinctly positive connotation. To these critics the term implies a writer rooted to his soil in an age of restless and alienated writers - a writer drawing on a rich tradition. But for others, the term is entirely negative: it implies a "provincial writer" - a writer dealing with narrow and unsophisticated material.

In addition, a considerable group of American critics found Faulkner's interest in the South a weakness because they felt that Faulkner's feelings about the South were so intense that he was unable to come to terms with it. They felt that his obsession procluded any objectivity or even the capacity to say something important about the region. Alfred Kazin makes this point:

> But his ability to invest his every observation of Southern life and manners with epic opulence and profligate rhetoric and Poe-like terror concealed the fact that he had no primary and design-like conception of the South, that his admiration and acceptance and disgust operated together in his mind.[16]

Kazin attributes much in Faulkner's work to this "inner confusion": the "nerve-jangled harshness," "the self-conscious grandeur," and the exaggeration of tension and tragedy.[17] Similarly, J.D. Adams feels that the violence and evil in Faulkner's work are not a reflection of Southern society or myth but a reflection of Faulkner's inner conflict.[18] For Adams this conflict is Faulkner's obsession with regret for the old South and hate for Northern industrialism. Like Kazin, he feels this obsession prohibits any important comment about the South:

> These reactions, so keenly felt by him, he has permitted to confuse and distort the social content of his novels, which I think has frequently been discussed with too great seriousness.19

Other criticism implies that Faulkner had some kind of sinister love-hate relationship with the South or that he was obsessed with either love or hate. Canby, for instance, feels that Faulkner hated the South:

> He is cruel with a cool and interested cruelty, he hates his Mississippi and his Memphis and all their works, with a hatred that is neither passionate nor the result of thwarting, but calm, reasoned, and complete.20

On the other hand, Oscar Cargill says of Sanctuary, "Only a man who loved his section too much could have written such a book."[21]

Most American critics, however, realized that Faulkner's relationship to the South had another side, that is, that his work derived a great deal from his tie with the South. Several critics note that Southern writers seem imbued with a sense of tragedy found nowhere else in American writing. As Snell says, "That vast, savage and demonic tragedy which he [Faulkner] sees life in the South to be is after all the fundamental fructifying principle of his art."[22] Mary Colum feels that Southern writers have certain qualities which Northern writers lack in their work:

> There is a complexity of interior life; there is a sense of tragedy; there is a sense of the relation of life to the soil, to the earth and the people around. The authors have an inherited culture, a culture and emotions that come out of leisure...."[23]

Delmore Schwartz comments that Faulkner's work which is located in Yoknapatawpha county is much superior to that work which takes place elsewhere. He proposes a possible explanation:

> The suggestion is that for Faulkner, as for most authors, actuality is an inexhaustible well or mine; imagination and invention are bogus unless they are bound to actuality and inspired by it. This is one of the most important senses in which art is an imitation of life, beyond any assent to the doctrines of naturalism and realism.[24]

And Walter Allen, an English critic with perhaps a greater perspective on the situation, comments:

> If early American writers regretted the lack of mystery, antiquity, shadow, etc., the civil war and reconstruction gave the South those qualities and Faulkner certainly capitalizes on it.[25]

The French reaction to the Southern-ness of Faulkner's work was almost entirely positive. Mayoux denies that Faulkner actually has much in common with the other writers he is often grouped with, such as Southern regionalists,[26] but it would seem that this comment was made, not to deny the Southern quality of Faulkner's work, but rather to lessen the association between Caldwell, and others, with Faulkner.

French critics readily noted Faulkner's strong tie with the South. As Weidlé says, "Sa patrie, ce ne sont pas les Etats-Unis, ce sont les Etats du Sud."[27] Soulac notes that, "Peu d'écrivains ont été aussi fortement marqués par leur pays natal que William Faulkner."[28] Marcel Aymé comments on Faulkner's uniqueness among his contemporary American writers, for Faulkner seems the only one who is "deeply rooted in his native soil."[29] Henri Peyre recognizes, as did several American critics,

that Southern writers, and Faulkner in particular, are endowed with a sense of history and often a sense of tragedy or even a curse.[30] Baiwir notes that Faulkner's pessimism is not that of his contemporaries: its origins are entirely Southern:

> Ce désespoir qui pèse comme une dalle funéraire sur l'ensemble de l'oeuvre, il [Faulkner] l'a respiré dès son enfance: c'est le désespoir du Sud hautin, aristocratique, dont la guerre civile est venue briser la puissance et qui se meurt au milieu de ses souvenirs.[31]

d) Faulkner's Work as Provincial or Universal

Closely connected with the question of Faulkner's regionalism as a strength or weakness in his work, is the problem of whether Faulkner's work is provincial or universal: does the very strong sense of locality limit the significance of his novels or are the implications of his works universal? Stanley Woodworth implies that the French, following the lead of Larbaud's criticism, saw Faulkner as universal, whereas the Americans saw him first as provincial.[32] This seems to be very largely true. Larbaud, in his preface to Tandis que j'agonise (1932), perceived an epic, mythic quality to the work which extended the meaning beyond the geographic limitations of Yoknapatawpha county. Even without the particular epic drama which Larbaud saw behind the story, he notes, "Les personnages de M. William Faulkner ont une qualité et une vérité humaines qui nous touchent plus profondément que l'exotisme de leur milieu."[33]

Generally, the French critics followed Larbaud's direction. But some critics, such as Brodin see a limiting quality in the Southernness of Faulkner's work:

> Loin d'avoir, comme la plupart des grands écrivains américains d'aujourd'hui, l'esprit international, loin de s'intéresser à toute l'Amérique, William Faulkner

> est essentiellement l'aboutissement de la tradition aristocratique méridionale. C'est un produit et un indigène d'Oxford (Mississippi)....C'est un homme du Sud, qui adore et renie le Sud tout à la fois et pour qui le Sud est le centre du monde, l'aiguillon, la nourriture et, peut-être, la barrière de son imagination.[34]

Most French critics, however, did not find the regionalism a limitation in Faulkner's work. Lalou recognizes that Faulkner is "un romancier régionaliste, implacablement fidèle à sa terre natale." Yet he sees Faulkner as an interpreter of "la condition humaine".[35] Jacques Duesberg, like Larbaud, sees mythic qualities in Faulkner's work of universal significance. Thus he concludes:

> Une localisation aussi systématique ne doit pas induire en erreur sur la portée d'une oeuvre aussi profonde: il serait absurde de ravaler Faulkner au rang d'écrivain régional.[36]

Early American criticism found no justification, much less profound universality, in Faulkner's works. It was not until the discussions of the morality of Faulkner's works and the role of the South in Faulkner's works were fully developed that American critics would even consider the possibility that Faulkner's works were of universal significance. However, once American criticism reached this stage, in the late forties, most critics saw Faulkner as universal rather than provincial.

This reaction was not unanimous, however. Maclachlan continued to feel that the limited subject restricted the work's relationship to the real world:

> [Faulkner] writes of the folk of a sharply limited area in Mississippi; he writes of them from a consistent view point, that of the endemic but detached aristocrat; and lastly, he presents a viewpoint that begets a relatively uncomplex interpretation of the social order which surrounds his <u>personae</u> and infuses it with a limited variety of castes and kinds of folk and an even more limited reference to the outer world.[37]

Ultimately, however, this was not the most common opinion. A. Wigfall Green feels that, "Faulkner is a compelling novelist because he has found universality in provincialism."[38] John Wilson rejects the term "regional" because of the universal quality in Faulkner's work:

> Though his stories take their settings from the Mississippi scene, he cannot be classified as a regionalist. The quality of universality that is apparent in his works acts as a force tending to subordinate that which is strictly regional.[39]

Frohock perceives a universality in Faulkner's work comparable to that of the Greek tragedies:

> ...Faulkner's people are Southerners only by geographical chance. Their lot, as Faulkner sees it, is the lot of the generality of men, Man's Fate: to be surrounded by evil, and inevitably, out of their own natures, to be both victims and workers of evil.[40]

Several critics, however, find that the comments implicit in Faulkner's works are particularly appropriate to our modern situation. As Robert Penn Warren says:

> It is important, I think, that Faulkner's work be regarded not in terms of the South agains the North, but in terms of issues which are common to our modern world. The legend is not merely a legend of the South, but is also a legend of our general plight and problem.[41]

And Kohler concurs:

> Unless I am greatly mistaken, Faulkner is writing about the disorders of our time, and age marked by social collapse and the decay of traditional morality. His Yoknapatawpha County is more than a microcosm of the South; it is a compass point in the geography of man's fate.[42]

Thus, it seems that by the end of our period the French and American critics were in general agreement on the universality of Faulkner's works. This was not the case, however, in earlier criticism, for it was not until after the re-evaluation of Faulkner in the forties that American critics perceived any subject matter worthy of universal

significance.

FAULKNER AS SOCIAL CRITIC, HISTORIAN OR MYTHMAKER

Presenting Faulkner as a social critic, historian or mythmaker was really just another way of justifying Faulkner's work. Though this line of criticism certainly opened up new aspects of Faulkner's work, in many ways its greatest importance is that it finally made Faulkner acceptable in the eyes of American critics. The morality behind the works became apparent once Faulkner's novels were read as allegory or history. In fact, the reappraisal of Faulkner's content and his morality are inseparable. While the French did not find any such breakthrough necessary in order to recognize the puritanism and idealism in Faulkner's work, the Americans could find no justification to the work until the social issues in it were recognized.

Of course, Faulkner was immediately recognized as a "Southern writer," but it was not until late in our period that American critics began to perceive that he was writing about the South: that is, the subject of his work was, to a considerable extent, "the South." The South was more than a colorful backdrop: it was largely the focus of attention. Kazin's statement is typical of the earlier attitude:

> As a thinker, as a participant in the communal myth of the South's tradition and decline, Faulkner was curiously dull, furiously commonplace and often meaningless, suggesting some ambiguous irresponsibility and exasperated sullenness of mind, some distant atrophy or indifference.[43]

Warren Beck was one of the first to suggest that Faulkner warranted a closer look:

> Although for more than a decade William Faulkner's successive novels have made a conspicuous contribution to American literature, their extraordinary values, both artistic and sociological, have yet to be recognized. Faulkner's searching view of life has not always been rightly and fully understood; furthermore, the novels' wide base in Southern history and present-day society

> and the author's profoundly philosophical interpretation of that history and society, have not been appreciated.[44]

But it was Malcolm Cowley's plea which had the greates impact:

> It is time to make a plea for the work of William Faulkner. More than that of any other living American author it has been misinterpreted by the critics and, in recent years, neglected by the public at large. Of his seventeen published books...not one has had a sale in the trade edition of as much as 20,000 copies. Almost all are now out of print....[46]

a) O'Donnell to Cowley

The general import of O'Donnell's argument has already been summarized (see Chapter Four), but to recapitulate even more briefly O'Donnell argued that Faulkner was writing legends based on Southern history. O'Donnell perceived in the confrontation between the Snopeses and the Sartorises a universal conflict between the new, amoral, powerful forces and the old, traditional, moral, but diminishing forces. In this he felt that Faulkner was hoping to find a new ethic which would be relevant and vital to modern problems.

Cowley continued from O'Donnell's starting point. Cowley did not actually add a great deal to O'Donnell's original suggestion, but he modified it, elaborated on it, and, most important, he published a great many articles making his point. Cowley had been consistently critical of Faulkner's technique and morality in the thirties, but in the forties he began a reappraisal which radically effected American criticism of Faulkner. However, Cowley, never came to admire Faulkner's narrative technique: his interest in Faulkner as a Southern writer seemed to exclude an appreciation of Faulkner as a craftsman.

Cowley felt that as the Yoknapatawpha cycle became complete, it became clear that "the story of Yoknapatawpha county [stood] as a

parable or legend of the Deep South as a whole."[46] He also felt that the basic situation in each of these novels was always the same: "Briefly it is the destruction of the old Southern order, by war and military occupation and still more by finance capitalism that tempts and destroys it from within."[47] Cowley found the core of these novels very pertinent:

> But the theme of all his Yocknapatawpha novels is very real: it is the decline of the planting aristocracy to which the Faulkners belonged; it is the rise of new men descended, so he tells us, from bushwhackers and carpetbaggers; it is the poverty of the white farmers on their sand-hill cotton patches; it is the growing hostility between races; it is the slow bleeding of the land itself and the decomposition of a whole society.[48]

From this it might seem that Cowley emphasized the social and historical issues more than O'Donnell, who was looking primarily at Faulkner's mythology, but the two are actually extremely hard to separate. As Conrad Aiken points out, it is impossible to distinguish between the truth and the lengend.[49]

Cowley did, in fact, comment on Faulkner's legend. As he saw it people like Sartoris and Sutpen wanted to establish a lasting social order, but the guilt in their way of life put a curse on the land, "Because its owners had treated human beings as instruments...." The outcome of this was the Civil War. After the war they tried to restore what was lost, but they invariably failed because they had lost their former strength. The ascending poor whites (i.e. the Snopeses) contributed to the downfall of the older families, because the Snopeses were willing to use tactics outside the traditional code.[50]

In this light, what had once seemed objectionable in Faulkner now had an explanation which was its justification. Violence became the expression of "moral confusion and social decay"[51] in the South, and

"crimes are symbols in Faulkner's mind of the social decomposition that is his real theme...."[52] What had once seemed to be gratuitous sensationalism now had a certain rationale. Thus even that most condemned work, Sanctuary, was justified on this basis. Cowley, in his reappraisal, now saw this novel as

> ...full of sexual nightmares that are in reality social symbols. In the author's mind the novel is somehow connected with what he regards as the rape and corruption of the South.[53]

b) Absalom, Absalom!

American critics tended to point to Absalom, Absalom! as the best example of Southern legend or history in Faulkner's work. O'Donnell cites it first:

> The book is really a summary of the whole career of the tradition - its rise, its fatal defects, its opponents, its decline, and its destruction. The action is of heroic proportions....And the book ends with a ritualistic purgation of the doomed house, by fire, which is as nearly a genuine tragic scene as anything in modern fiction.[54]

Warren Beck also saw Absalom, Absalom! as Faulkner's most complete analysis of Southern history. Beck suggests that Sutpen's "mistake...is obviously his unprincipled surrender to and fanatical participation in the unrighteous caste system at which he had first taken affront." Thus Sutpen's mistake was the same as the South's.[55] Cowley elaborates on the parallels at greatest length though his conclusions are quite cautious:

> Then slowly it dawns on you that most of the characters and incidents [in Absalom, Absalom!] have a double meaning; that besides their place in the story, they also serve as symbols or metaphors with a general application. Sutpen's great design, the land he stole from the Indians, the French architect who built his house with the help of wild Negroes from the jungle, the woman of mixed blood whom he married and disowned, the unacknowledge son who ruined him, the poor white whom he wronged and who killed him in anger, the final destruction of the mansion like the downfall of a social order: all these might

> belong to a tragic fable of Southern history. With a little cleverness, the whole novel might be explained as a connected and logical allegory, but this, I think, would be going beyond the author's intention. First of all he was writing a story, and one that affected him deeply, but he was also brooding over a social situation. More or less unconsciously, the incidents in the story came to represent the forces and elements in the social situation, since the mind naturally works in terms of symbols and parallels. In Faulkner's case, this form of parallelism is not confined to Absalom, Absalom! It can be found in the whole fictional framework that he has been elaborating in novel after novel, until his work has become a myth or legend of the South.[56]

The lateness of Cowley's contribution, in our period of study, and its relative completeness contributed to the redundancy of the discussions of this subject which followed his. Numerous critics reiterated or even paraphrased his arguments, but the level of discussion was not significantly advanced after Cowley's articles appeared.

c) The French Reaction

Stanley Woodworth states that the Southern traditions and legends in Faulkner's works are much more important to the American critic than to the French critic. This is so, in spite of the French interest in cultures, because many of the qualities of the South are not translatable:

> Les Américains, lisant un texte rich en couleur locale, voient en Faulkner un homme obsédé par le mythe du Sud; les Français, pour qui ces expressions sont inaccessibles trouvent en lui d'autres richesses métaphysiques et techniques.[57]

Larbaud was one of the first, on either continent, to perceive in Faulkner's work a myth. He saw epic qualities in As I Lay Dying:

> Du reste nous pouvons, sans aucune intention de parodier le sujet de ce roman, le transposer en un épisode de caractère épique: l'épisode des Obsèques de la reine (homérique) Addie Bundren, conduites selon ses dernières volontés par son époux Anse et par les princes leurs enfants....[58]

But, beyond the precise differences between the myths Cowley and Larbaud

perceive, there are some very important differences in the nature of their perceptions. Larbaud discerns an epic myth; having universal overtones, it is not associated with any locality. But the legends which American critics saw in Faulkner's works could not take place beyond the boundaries of the South. To be sure, some American critics spoke of ritual or myth, rather than legend, but this was usually the exception. Whan, for instance, sees Absalom, Absalom! as a Gothic myth,[59] and Arthos sees a pattern of ritual in Faulkner's work, but even the ritual is designed to reveal and make intelligible the past of the South.[60]

It would seem then that initially a certain cultural barrier prevented the French critics from percieving the distinctly Southern quality of Faulkner's myth. In the late forties, however, Cowley's introduction to the Portable Faulkner which presented his views on Faulkner's legend of the South, appeared in translation in France.[61] After this there was considerable comment from French critics on Southern traditions in Faulkner's work. Several recall Cowley's arguments very closely. Simon speaks of the legend in general:

> De même les Sartoris d'autrefois sont plus que des personnages réels: par leur exageration même, ils synthétisent les traits séduisants d'une caste orgueilleuse, chevaleresque, inflexible et au fond enfantine, qui n'a plus de place dans la société d'aujourd'hui, mais qui répond toujours en nous à certains velléités d'idéalisme. Si bien que, plus encore qu'une peinture sociale, la lutte des deux epoques, celle des Sartoris et celles des Snopes, est un symbole.[62]

Brodin closely paraphrases Cowley's assessment of the function of crimes in Faulkner's work:

> Mais ces crimes sont des symboles. Ils représentent la décomposition sociale du Sud, - qui est le thème réel de la chronique jeffersonienne, - et symbolisent la catastrophe vers laquelle le Sud se laisse entraîner.[63]

Coindreau's summary does not differ greatly from O'Donnell's:

> Il semble de plus en plus certain que l'oeuvre de William Faulkner apparaîtra, lors de sa conclusion, comme une vaste antithèse entre le vieux Sud, celui qu'il aime et qu'il admire les temps héroïques des combats et de la galanterie, et le nouveau Sud, celui qu'il méprise, le Sud des maquignons et des hommes d'affaires sans scrupules. Le premier, c'est le Sud des Sartoris, le second, celui des Snopes.[64]

Claude-Edmonde Magny is also clearly aware of Cowley's criticism, but her approach remains very universal and somehow unrelated to the South:

> Mais la vraie fascination...est plus profonde: c'est la fascination même de la Légende, du grand Temps immobile et figé qui se découvre graduellement aux yeux des mortels comme la seule image de l'Eternité qui leur soit désormais perceptible.[65]

Duesberg discusses Faulkner's mythology at some length. Though he goes far beyond Cowley's interpretation, he, too, sees in Faulkner's work "la traduction légendaire d'un monde en voie de désintégration."[66]

In summary, this area of criticism was much more important to the American critic than to the French. Initially Faulkner was seen as part of the "Southern revival", but this was not altogether to his advantage. He was associated with Caldwell particularly, against whom there was also considerable critical reaction, and it seems that, in general, there may have been some prejudice against works of Southern regionalism. Many American critics found the Southern quality of Faulkner's novels a disadvantage because of his "obsession" with the South, but others admitted that Faulkner's relationship with the South provided great intensity to his works. The French, on the other hand, were generally fascinated by the South and thoroughly enjoyed Faulkner's regionalism. Ultimately most American and French critics agreed that Faulkner's regionalism did not make his work provincial.

The suggestion that Faulkner was writing a mythology, made by O'Donnell and expanded by Cowley, transformed American criticism of Faulkner. It was this point of view which made Faulkner both intelligible and acceptable to most American critics. This transformation had little impact on the French; they had never had serious reservations about the morality of Faulkner's work, nor were they as concerned with the history and social problems of the area as the American critics were. Thus even though Faulkner had found acceptance in both France and America by 1950, the basis for that acceptance was different in each country.

PART III: Conclusion

## SOME POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE DIFFERENT FRENCH AND AMERICAN REACTION

We have seen that the French and American reaction differed considerably. The contrast is particularly striking in the initial stages of criticism; once consensus was reached among critics, and certain critical works were translated or became known abroad, the difference between French and American criticism becomes much less noticeable.

Though certain differences, as we have seen, can be attributed to language barriers and problems of translation, most of the contrast is attributable to cultural differences. Of course, the extent of the impact of cultural bias on critical reaction is not an easy thing to judge: it is extremely difficult to "prove" any hypothesis in this area. But we will consider many of the suggestions which have been made as to why the French critics reacted as they did and the Americans as they did.

### THE CRITICS AND THE CRITICISM.

One striking difference between the French and American reaction is in the critics themselves. Faulkner seems to have appealed particularly to French who were writers as well as critics, such as Malraux and Sartre.[1] His appeal to them undoubtedly lay in his innovations in technique. The importance of their approval of Faulkner's work cannot be underestimated. Sanctuary was the first of Faulkner's novels to be translated into French, and with it appeared Malraux's introduction. There seems to be no doubt that Malraux's eminence prevented the kind

of moralistic reaction which occurred in America against Sanctuary. As Coindreau says:

> The danger which Sanctuaire might present was exorcised by the admirable preface of Malraux. At the very first stroke the author of La Condition humaine was able to show the reader that, under the excess of the plot, was hidden a depth which many American critics, hypnotised by the corncob, had not seen.[2]

Stanley Woodworth reached the same conclusion:

> Le Faulkner de Sanctuaire avait été canonisé par André Malraux, et jouissait ainsi d'une certaine immunité critique; puisque sa brutalité était au service de son art tragique, on ne pouvait pas la lui reprocher.[3]

The continued support of eminent French critics, such as Malraux, Magny, Larbaud, and Sartre, whether writers themselves or not, seems to have assured Faulkner of acceptance in France.

America simply did not have any critics of this stature, nor was it as common for authors to write extensive criticism on other writers, as it was in France. There are, of course, some exceptions, such as Robert Penn Warren, but he certainly did not have the stature in America as a writer which Malraux had in France. Most other writers are noticeably silent or openly hostile, such as Wyndham Lewis.

A corollary to the impact of the first French critics to appraise Faulkner, is the general consensus among French critics concerning Faulkner. It would seem that not only did the praise of certain critics assure acceptance for Faulkner, it also discouraged later critics from disagreeing with the initial arguments. As Woodworth notes:

> L'accueil fait à Faulkner en France révèle, au bon sens du mot, un certain conformisme parmi les critiques. Au lieu de se disputer entre eux, ils donnent plutôt l'impression de se compléter les uns les autres. Les meilleurs critiques sont plus ou moins d'accord pour dégager certains thèmes de l'oeuvre de Faulkner; de même, ils ont été frappés par certaines techniques.[4]

This is again in sharp contrast with American criticism. Although certain lines of discussion arose, these seemed to polarize opinion into bitter opposition and it is not until the late forties that even the beginning of any consensus can be seen.

THE FRENCH REACTION

a) The Popularity of American Novels

It should be kept in mind that Faulkner was not the only American writer of the period who was admired in France. In fact, the American novel, in general, was very popular among the French public at this time and well received by the critics. But other French favorites, such as Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Steinbeck, were not so strikingly unappreciated in their own country. In any event the popularity of the American novel in France did undoubtedly aid Faulkner in his introduction there. As Stanley Woodworth says, "Il ne faut pas non plus oublier la vogue du roman américain, qui favorisait une première lecture de Faulkner en France."[5]

b) Cultural Curiosity

One reason for the popularity of the American novel seems to have been curiosity about American life, on the part of the French. There seems to have been a certain attraction toward that which was so strikingly different from life in France. Marcel Arland comments on this attraction:

> Les livres de Faulkner offrent pour un français l'attrait d'un monde à peu près nouveau. Le peuple de la Louisiane qu'il met en scène, nègres, fermiers, pasteurs, petits bourgeois, est à la fois assez primitif et assez civilisé pour lui offrir les plus violentes images de luxure, de cruauté et de démence.[6]

Sartre speaks of a common quality in American novels which appealed to the French:

> What fascinated us all really - petty bourgeois that we were, sons of peasants securely attached to the earth of our farms, intellectuals entrenched in Paris for life - was the constant flow of men across a whole continent.... the hopeless wanderings of the hero in Light in August....[7]

Ansermoz-Dubois makes a slightly different suggestion:

> Les raisons de leur [Faulkner et Caldwell] succès... sont diverses: ils plaisent parce que l'élément brutal que leurs oeuvres révèlent correspond à l'image que le lecteur français se fait des Etats-Unis. Ils plaisent parce qu'ils établissent que tout, là-bas, n'est pas si bien après tout, et qu'ils rassurent, en quelque sorte. Ils plaisent (du moins les premiers) parce qu'ils peignent une région des Etats-Unis restée très près du coeur français: le Sud.[8]

Milano comments on how differently the French and the American critics perceived the cultural quality of Faulkner's work:

> To an American a Faulkner novel presumably means Southern aristocrats, poor whites, Negroes in extremis - and a rhetoric now powerful, now dubious. For a European the same novel is a "notes from the underground" of industrial America...[9]

c) Need for Renewal

Cultural curiosity, however, only superficially explains the French critical receptiveness to Faulkner and to the American novel in general. It would seem that, in general, the French critics were attracted to Faulkner because he showed them a new direction for which they were already searching. Proust had taken the novel of analysis and introspection to its ultimate extreme, leaving new writers at a dead end.[10] In both form and subject, Faulkner and other American authors presented these writers with an alternative: novels of directness, action and vitality.

Malraux is perhaps an instructive example. He had already abandoned the novel of analysis and turned to "capturing the mysteries of man in action"[11] before he became aware of the American novelists and their work. Though Faulkner is quite different from his American contemporary writers,

they all seemed to share a directness of technique and brutality of subject which seemed appropriate for the problems confronting Malraux and his generation. The analysis of intellectuals was no longer sufficient and the Americans seemed to have an alternative, if not the perfect solution. Malraux himself said of American novels:

> ...to my mind, the essential characteristic of contemporary American writing is that it is the only literature whose creators are not intellectuals....They are obsessed with fundamental man....The great problem of this literature is now to intellectualize itself without losing its direct approach.[12]

French critics, before and after 1950, have been very much aware of the need for renewal in their literature during this period. As Coindreau says, "It is when a literature is showing signs of lassitude that influences begin to make themselves felt."[13] Malherbe comments on lassitude in the French novel of analysis:

> Le "roman passif" est, en somme, le roman d'analyse que nos écrivains ont amené à un point d'excellence. Notre supériorité dans ce genre est partout reconnue. On voudrait que notre roman d'analyse, tout en se maintenant dans sa pureté de ligne et sa nuance subtile, perdît un peu de sa pâleur de princesse cloitrée.[14]

Henri Peyre notes that the French were not interested in Faulkner and his generation of writers simply because of the cultural extremes and eccentricities they portrayed:

> Behind unusual aspects of the United States, the French readers of American works seek something deeper, of which they are in dire need: a message of vitality and a freshness of vision which raise violence and vice to the stature of the epic.
> For the literature of Europe, however expert in technique and subtle in psychological dissection, lacks vigor and knows it. Kafka and Proust, Huxley and Gide, Auden and Rilke are supremely endowed in intelligence and in sensitiveness: but they lack imaginative power to recreate life, that is, an intense grasp on the concrete. They are unequalled in self-conscious delineation of moods of frustration and of repression, in polished irony, and even in

> searching exploration of the recesses of the ego. But their readers detect signs of excessive maturity in their over-refined works and yearn for the uncouth youthfulness which Steinbeck, Hemingway and Caldwell seem to have in abundance.15

Jean-Paul Sartre was perhaps the most thorough commentator on the subject. He emphasizes the importance of the technical innovations which the American novelists made:

> What has aroused our enthusiasm among the recent novelists whom I have mentioned is a veritable revolution in the art of telling a story. The intellectual analysis which, for more than a century had been the accepted method of developing character in fiction was no longer anything but an old mechanism badly adapted to the needs of the time. ...These American authors have taught us that what we thought were immutable laws in the art of the novel were only a group of postulates which one might shift about without danger. Faulkner has taught us that the necessity of relating a story in chronological order was only a postulate and that one may use any order in telling the story as long as that order allows an author to evaluate the situation, the atmosphere, and the characters....16

Sartre, like Peyre, denies that violence in American novels was the main attraction:

> We have not sought with morose delight stories of murder and rape, but lessons in a renewal of the art of writing. We were weighted down, without being aware of it, by our traditions and our culture. These American novelists, without such traditions, without help, have forged, with barbaric brutality, tools of inestimable value. We collected these tools but we lack the naïveté of their creators. We thought about them, we took them apart and put them together again, we theorized about them, and we attempted to absorb them into our great traditions of the novel. We have treated consciously and intellectually what was the fruit of a talented and unconscious spontaneity.17

Sartre also preceives how and why America and France should react so differently to the same novels:

> It is entirely natural that the American public, weary of direct and brutal novels which attempt to paint groups or sociological developments, should return to novels of analysis. But analytical novels flood our country. We created

> the genre....Henry James can please us, charm us, but he teaches us nothing - nor does Dreiser.[18]

d) Realism

As has been suggested, the French were attracted to the American novels not only because of their new techniques, but because the technique and the subject seemed well suited to the problems of the period. Sartre comments on the appropriateness of Faulkner's art to deal with the age he lived in. "Nous vivons au temps des révolutions impossibles, et Faulkner emploie son art extraordinaire à décrire ce monde qui meurt de vieillesse et notre étouffement."[19]

The World Wars seem to have made the French audience feel that the violence in Faulkner and other American authors was not gratuitous; rather it was an accurate reflection of the violence of the era. Henri Peyre suggests this:

> The vision of brutality and swift, cruel, illogical action presented by American novels then became an all too real nightmare in the countries invaded by Germany [in the Second World War]....American books assumed a prophetic character. They proved to be the ones best attuned to a tragic era of incomprehensible violence and of brutal inhumanity of man to man.[20]

What the French perceived as "realism" in Faulkner's work very much appealed to them. As Emié notes, this quality was lacking in the French novel of analysis:

> Que tout, dans Lumière d'août, ait de quoi rebuter le lecteur français, certes, il ne faut pas en douter une minute. Le roman, en France, c'est une démonstration logique objective, une question posée qui trouve après quelque deux cents pages sa réponse. Mais tout cela, si seduisant soit-il, est bien loin de la vérité et de la réalité. Je sais bien que les thèmes habituellement traités par les romanciers de chez nous ne leur permettent qu'une évasion toute relative et sans cesse limitée par un cadre et un milieu insuffisamment renouvelés.[21]

e) Existentialism

In recent years a considerable amount of criticsm has been devoted to Faulkner's "existentialism." While it would seem extremely risky to suggest that either Faulkner or the French critics, such as Sartre, ever considered Faulkner an existentialist, it is clear that Faulkner did have in common with the existentialists certain concerns and certain techniques. But the French writers' and critics' approach to these matters was much more conscious and intellectual; for Faulkner these concerns were never a doctrine of philosophy as they were for Sartre and others.

Since 1950, both American and French critics have commented frequently on the affinities between Faulkner and the French existentialists. Slabey, speaking of As I Lay Dying, summarizes the reaction:

> Although the novel is both humorous and sad, the theme is neither the comedy of human frailty nor the tragedy of human endeavor; it is the absurdity of human existence. This should make it evident why the French translation was received enthusiastically by the Parisian Existentialists; they could agree with the picture of life in the novel, especially the emphasis on existence, the treatment of a scene by one "engaged" in it, the antichronology of events, the utter nullity of non-existence, the loneliness and anguish of man, and the emptiness and futility of life.[22]

Again the French critics found in Faulkner a writer very much in tune with present problems and realities. Both he and they felt keenly a sense of despair resulting from the collapse of absolutes in the modern world. Stanley Woodworth speaks of this despair:

> L'atmosphére de désespoir qui se dégage d'un roman de Faulkner se prête facilement à une interprétation existentialiste. Faulkner était à son apogée en France en 1946, époque à laquelle l'existentialisme était roi. Nous pouvons dire que le désespoir faulknérien trouvait un climat philosophique très favorable dans la France d'après-guerre.[23]

Simon also points to the attitude toward disaster in Faulkner:

> The apocalyptic landscape in modern literature usually has a point of departure in some sort of natural cataclysm such as a flood. Faulkner, however, has sought to interpret the modern, conventional world as the same sort of menace without the pretext of an outside cataclysm. It is this characteristic of his novels that has been most admired by Europeans....These works provide a direction, showing that existential experience and imagery can be drawn from the pasteboard realities of contemporary civilization and are not dependent merely upon an elemental primitivism or abstraction of mythic dimensions.[24]

William Sowder notes that both Sartre and Faulkner share in common the importance of the survival and endurance of man through conflict.[25]

Often cited, also, is the sense of "absurdity" shared by Faulkner and the existentialists. Marcel Brion notes:

> Ils lui découvrent l'absurdité de la vie et l'amènent ainsi à une position philosophique toute voisine de celle de l'existentialisme, qui, à juste titre, revendique Faulkner comme un de ses exposants.[26]

Guérard also mentions Faulkner's affinities with absurdity:

> The actual interest in existentialism has certainly contributed to prolong in France the debates [on Faulkner]; more than any other modern novelist, more than Joyce, Faulkner seems to put in his works the "philosophy of the absurd." The everpresent macabre humor and horror, the exoticism and places and strangeness of style, the revelation of a conscience foreign and profoundly "puritan" - all this gives to the work of Faulkner an originality and a complexity much more striking for the French than for the Americans.[27]

It should be kept in mind, however, that one of the important elements of Faulkner's sense of absurdity is the denial of any future - the supreme dominance of the past over man. This was an attitude which an existentialist such as Sartre vehemently opposed. Thus, one must be careful in claiming close affinities between the French existentialists and Faulkner. Not only are there certain diverging attitudes, but the French existentialists' conscious use of existentialism as a

doctrine of philosophy separates them sharply from Faulkner.

THE AMERICAN REACTION

The American reaction was entirely different. Neither content, nor form were acceptable to most American readers. As Snell notes, there are three alienating qualities to Faulkner's work:

> ...his recondite narrative method; his pessimistic, nihilistic philosophy with its attendant emphasis on the abnormal and subnormal in human behavior; and lastly, his ornate, involved prose style.[28]

Joseph Warren Beach cites the same qualities:

> So then we have a writer of stories morbid and repellent in subject matter often affected in style and strained in motivation, and almost invariably teasing and eccentric in manner of narration - one could hardly imagine a more formidable array of barriers set up by an author between himself and his audience....[29]

Even the French seem to be aware of these reasons for the rejection of Faulkner in America. Brodin notes:

> William Faulkner n'est pas, - tout au moins à l'époque où nous écrivons, - prophète en son pays. On lui accorde du talent, mais il n'est ni populaire ni apprécié à sa juste valeur. Il est facile de voir pourquoi. N'a-t-il pas tout fait pour détourner de son oeuvre le grand public américain? Il n'aime pas la publicité. Il n'écrit pas pour plaire. Il a la réputation d'être obscur. Le lecteur paresseux est découragé d'avance par la composition intemporelle de ses romans....Les esprits simples seront gênés par les affectations et la complexité faulknériennes. Les esprits peu profonds craindront ses profondeurs.[30]

What is somewhat more surprising, however, is that this reaction was not limited to the "average American reader," but was endorsed and encouraged by a large number of American critics. We would hope, at least, that these American critics were not all "les esprits simples," "les lecteurs paresseux," and "les esprits peu profonds."

a) Difficulty of Faulkner's Narrative Technique and Style.

It is clear from Chapters One and Two that, in general, the American

critics objected strenuously to the difficulty of Faulkner's form. Many of them found that Faulkner's style and narrative technique made his novels virtually inaccessible and that it was not worth the effort to persevere with his works. Though this may have been due, in part, to laziness, it is not the whole reason. American critics seemed unable to accept Faulkner largely because his narrative technique and style were so different from that of his contemporaries. Attuned to a very easy, direct journalistic style and little experimentation in form, these critics undoubtedly found Faulkner's technique unnecessary and unacceptable.

Carvel Collins suggests that, more than the popularity of journalistic techniques, Faulkner's acceptance was impeded in America by the popularity of the "naturalistic" novel. He finds that it was not until the decline of naturalism in America that Faulkner began to increase in popularity. These naturalistic novels were characterized by a simple style, strict adherence to chronology, emphasis on sociology, and a lack of subtle symbolism.[31] Faulkner's work was in sharp contrast to all of these qualities, and this may well have blinded the American critics to the importance of Faulkner's work.

b) Morality in Faulkner's Work

Even more than the coolness to Faulkner's form, American criticism was marred by its moralistic extremism, as has been shown. This seems to be the most negative area of Faulkner criticism and the one in which the narrow mindedness of the critics is the most obvious. Without this almost hysterical element, American criticism would have been more rational, even if it was not, at first, terribly profound. This moralistic element seems to have been an almost unavoidable reaction triggered

by the Depression and the social problems of the period. Whether from a religious, humanistic, sociological or political point of view, novels with a social moral, a sense of purpose and an ethic became predominant. As has been mentioned, religious and political criticism was not as influential in France at this time. Sartre commented on the situation in America, "I have also concluded that at the moment there is a very strong reaction against the 'pessimistic' literature of the period between the two wars."[32]

Another reason for the American reaction against the violence and brutality in Faulkner novels seems to have been the feeling that he was painting an unflattering and even slanderous picture of life in the United States. There was even some hostility to the idea of translating Faulkner because of the impression it would make abroad. Sartre encountered this attitude in America:

> ...I met a young liberal writer....I told him I had been asked by my publishers to get in touch with literary agents of several writers who were particularly admired in France. He asked me the names of these writers. When I mentioned Caldwell, his friendly smile vanished suddenly; at the name of Steinbeck he raised his eyebrows; and at the mention of Faulkner he cried indignantly, "You French! Can't you ever like anything but filth?"[33]

Sartre, of course, did not perceive these authors as "filth," but rather believed that "your [American] authors...always appeared to us as critics of your society, moralists who report on humanity."[34] Pick also comments on how differently the French and Americans reacted to Faulkner. "Faulkner's Sanctuary is to the American reader first of all a horrible story about regional degeneracy and lynching. Both are mentioned merely incidentally in André Malraux's preface...."[35]

It would seem that, for the Americans, the subject was too violent

and too close to home for acceptance; it reflected too badly on them. They were unable to see beyond the regional eccentricities and violent subject. Though the French were interested in the cultural and unusual elements, the distance they had from the subject enabled them to see the total in greater perspective; they were not as offended by these qualities, nor were they limited to these superficial elements. They could see beyond them to what was more important in Faulkner's work. Both values and proximity contributed to this reaction.

OPENNESS VS. CONSERVATISM

Of course, there are so many contributing factors to such reactions that it is nearly impossible to take them all into account; we have touched on only a few of the possible reasons for this reaction. Much of this reaction was based on the situation of the literature itself. In France, the strong and rich tradition of the introspective and analytic novel had reached maturity and was waning. French novelists were already searching for something with which to replace it; their situation was one of openness, of security and readiness to adopt new elements into their own traditions. Like the writers, the critics were open to new forms and subjects.

The situation for the Americans was radically different. When Faulkner began writing, Americans had little perception or appreciation of their literary tradition. The generation of post-World War I writers was really the first surge of literary output. The Americans, too, were searching for directions for their novels, but among critics, if not among writers, there was greater conservatism than with the French. Rather than looking to new techniques, new innovations, the critics seemed to find the European example the primary valid one; i.e., to continue with the roman d'analyse.

Munson, writing in the French press, voices such sentiments:

> Je veux dire encore, considérant nos chefs de file, et jetant un regard vers l'Europe, que nous ne possédons aucun maître authentique du roman, car sûrement aucun des nôtres ne peut être comparé aux véritables maîtres comme Proust, Joyce, Mann, et de plus, je dirai que le roman américain contemporain est médiocre.36

> Nous voulons traiter des subjets qui nous soient propres, parler de notre propre peuple, vu par nous-mêmes, cela est bien et bon. Mais pour le moment nous allons à la dérive, sans traditions pour nous stabiliser, sans principes pour nous diriger, sans modèles pour nous exciter notre émulation. Il est nécessaire que nous soyons américains, mais nous devons avoir conscience qu'il y a des étapes dans le développement d'une littérature nationale, et ne pas surestimer la phase du récit naturaliste que nous vivons.37

The timidness and insecurity of Munson's opinion expresses a conservatism which was wide spread in America at this time. Having little in the way of literary traditions to admire, being almost totally unaware of what had been written in America, and having, for a century, looked to Europe for culture of any kind, it was difficult for many critics to see anything of value in an American work, perhaps more especially, in an American work from the South. Thus, the situation in America was in sharp contrast to that in France; while the French critics and writers were secure enough to permit an openness to new elements, the American critics were too timid, with the insecurity of having just arrived, to be confident in their own writers.

POE AND FAULKNER

Though the particular literary situation in the 1930's and 1940's contributed largely to the divergent reactions, I do not mean to suggest that the situation of the moment was the whole answer. In fact, a somewhat similar situation had already occurred in the previous century: the very different reactions of the French and the Americans to Edgar

Allan Poe.

Poe and Faulkner, when scrutinized closely, are very different men, both in their lives and their works, yet both the French and the Americans perceived striking similarities between the two. Though these similarities may seem somewhat superficial, it is interesting that both nationalities connected the two men. We will review some of these comments to see if the parallel between the two situations throws any light on the reactions towards Faulkner. Perhaps there is a quality in both writers which appeals to the French, yet repels the Americans.

Snell simply notes that:

> ...the South (and the rest of the country too, for that matter) seems to treat Faulkner with the same lack of appreciation that was meted out to Poe....For a long while it was thought that Faulkner, like Poe, was merely writing in the irresponsible mood of any moment in which to envisage and embody terror, horror, gloom - the black night of the soul.[38]

Calverton finds that "no American writer since Poe has created such wild, macabre, forbidding characters" as Faulkner has.[39] Calverton, Beck and Beach all feel that the primary difference between Poe and Faulkner is Faulkner's greater realism.[40]

DeVoto finds similarities with others besides Poe:

> This fiction of families destroyed by a mysterious curse (beginning with the Sartorises, there has been one in every novel except <u>As I Lay Dying</u> and <u>Pylon</u>), of ruined castles in romantic landscapes, of Giaours and dark "unwill" may be only a continuation of the literature of excessive heartbreak. The Poe of "Ligeia" and kindred tales, Charles Brockden Brown, Horace Walpole, and Mrs. Radcliffe suggest a clue to a state of mind which, after accepting the theorem that sensation is desirable for itself alone, has moved on to the further theorem that the more violent sensation is the more admirable, noble, and appropriate to fiction.[41]

Malcolm Cowley also finds similarities with several others:

> He belongs with the other writers who try to produce this single and somber effect - that is, with the

> "satanic" poets from Byron to Baudelaire, and with the "black" or "terrifying" novelists from Monk Lewis and the Hoffman of the "Tales" to Edgar Allan Poe.[42]

Loggins comments that:

> Faulkner is an artist of escape, and not such a strange romancer as he might on the surface appear. He is a belated literary descendant of Edgar Allan Poe and other nineteenth century gothicists who combed reality for horrors.[43]

The implication has been made in the previous comments, but Campbell makes it clear that prejudice against Poe is not a thing of the past in American criticism:

> The steady portrayal of devotion to duty [in As I Lay Dying], sincere if oddly conceived, seems to be adulterated in details like these [: the barn burning, putrefying corpse, etc.] with the less idealistic purpose of harassing the reader's sensibilities after the manner of some of Poe's short stories. It seems unfortunate that Faulkner should have been influenced by this aspect of Poe rather than by Poe's admirable plot arrangement.[44]

The French critics also perceived similarities between the two authors. Coindreau adds that Faulkner "continue la lignée des Edgar Poe et des Ambrose Bierce."[45] Jacques Duesberg comments on The Sound and the Fury as: "mélange d'horreur et d'obscurité, il s'inscrit dans la descendance de Brockden Brown et d'Edgar Allan Poe, prisés par les amateurs de névroses."[46] Brodin finds several parallels between the two authors:

> Même s'il n'avait fait que des histoires de "détection" psychologique, il serait assuré de durer autant que le créateur de la detective story américaine, cet autre écrivain de tradition et de culture méridionales, cet autre adepte du mystère et de la terreur qui s'appelait Edgar Allan Poe.[47]

Lenormand finds other similarities:

> Poe is always alive in our minds; Lanvière [sic] has just consecrated to him an imposing work, devoid (at last) of accusations and of systematic idealization. Faulkner was immediately recognized as belonging to the tradition of Poe, because of his power, and the means he uses, to

> transcend reality: his insistent brush-strokes, his repetition, his minuteness of detail - so many procedures turning their back on realism, but leading miraculously to a world of nightmare. This technique of hallucination and this constant exhalation of fright, naturally placed Faulkner in the succession of the master of horror.[48]

In total, most critics seem to find in common certain elements of the gothic tradition: qualities of horror, terror, mystery and sensation. It would also seem that now, as in Poe's day, the American critics do not find these qualities a positive factor, whereas the French do. Rather than assuming that the French like mystery and horror stories better than the Americans, it would seem again to be a matter of morality. The Americans are reluctant to accept gratuitous sensation. The excellence of the rendering of the sensation is not sufficient justification - morality or philosophy remain the only worthy rationalizations for art.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it seems that there are a great many factors contributing to the French and American reactions to Faulkner. There are biases built into the culture which transcend time periods and which are very powerful in determining the acceptability of a literary work. It would seem that, in spite of certain fluctuations in mores, the American critic, unlike his French counterpart, has traditionally demanded morality in literature. This was very much to Faulkner's detriment in America, until an underlying morality was recognized in his work. In addition to this, and other cultural biases, the inclinations of the particular period in which Faulkner wrote must be considered. Here again, the French and American situation differed sharply. The French were swayed toward American novelists in general by the vitality and vigor of these new works and they admired Faulkner in particular because of his

combination of experimental techniques and his métaphysique which they found appropriate to their period. The American critics perceived Faulkner in an altogether different light: his subject matter did not clearly present the social consciousness which the period demanded, and his form could not be justified by accessibility, nor by the precedent of other contemporary writers, either American or European.

## TABLE

### PUBLICATION DATES FOR FAULKNER'S MAJOR WORKS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Soldier's Pay | 1926 | |
| Mosquitoes | 1927 | |
| | 1928 | |
| Sartoris, The Sound and the Fury | 1929 | |
| As I Lay Dying | 1930 | |
| Sanctuary, These Thirteen | 1931 | |
| Light in August | 1932 | |
| | 1933 | Sanctuaire |
| Doctor Martino and Other Stories | 1934 | Tandis que j'agonise |
| Pylon | 1935 | Lumière d'août |
| Absalom, Absalom! | 1936 | |
| | 1937 | Sartoris |
| The Unvanquished | 1938 | Le Bruit et la fureur |
| The Wild Palms | 1939 | Treize histoires |
| The Hamlet | 1940 | |
| | 1941 | |
| Go Down, Moses | 1942 | |
| | 1943 | |
| | 1944 | |
| | 1945 | |
| | 1946 | Pylône |
| | 1947 | |
| Intruder in the Dust | 1948 | Le Doctor Martino et autres histoires, Monnaie de Singe, Moustiques |
| Knight's Gambit | 1949 | L'Invaincu |
| | 1950 | |

# FOOTNOTES

## INTRODUCTION

[1] In approaching the French and American criticism, we have not been terribly strict about the origins of the critic. We will note when French critics appear in American publications and when American critics appear in French publications. But the French criticism will include some commentators who are not native Frenchmen. Also, a number of Canadian and occasionally even English critics, are included in the American criticism.

[2] Maurice E. Coindreau, "William Faulkner in France," Yale French Studies, No. 10 (1953), p. 90.

[3] Stanley Woodworth, William Faulkner en France, 1931-1952 (Paris: Minard, 1959), pp. 17-36.

[4] The American bibliography is considerably larger than the French. Of course, it is to be expected that the Americans would have had a greater volume of criticism on Faulkner than the French, but the French selection has been hampered somewhat by availability.

## CHAPTER ONE

[1] Anonymous, "Mosquitoes," Saturday Review of Literature, 3 (25 June, 1927), p. 933.

[2] Alfred Kazin, "Faulkner: The Rhetoric and the Agony," Virginia Quarterly Review, 18 (Summer 1942), p. 394.

[3] Malcolm Cowley, "William Faulkner Revisited," Saturday Review of Literature, 28 (14 April 1945), p. 13.

[4] Ibid., p. 14.

[5] Harry M. Campbell, "Experiment and Achievement," Sewanee Review, 51 (1943), pp. 318, 319.

[6] C. Cestre, "William Faulkner: Light in August," Revue anglo-américaine, 10 (Juin 1933), p. 466.

[7] Jacques Duesberg, "Un Créateur de mythes: William Faulkner," Synthèses, (déc. 1948), p. 348.

[8] Conrad Aiken, "William Faulkner: The Novel as Form," Atlantic Monthly, 164 (Nov. 1939), p. 651.

[9] Wyndham Lewis, "Moralist with a Corncob," Men Without Art (London: Cassell and Co., 1934), p. 48.

[10] Warren Beck, "William Faulkner's Style," American Prefaces, 6 (Spring 1941), p. 196.

[11] Kazin, Virginia Quarterly Review, p. 400.

[12] Beck, American Prefaces, pp. 196, 197.

[13] Claude-Edmonde Magny, "Faulkner, ou l'inversion théologique," L'Age du roman américain (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1948), pp. 198, 199.

[14] Edward Cushing, "A Collection of Studies," Saturday Review of Literature, 8 (17 October 1931), p. 201.

[15] Camille McCole, "William Faulkner: Cretins, Coffins, Worms, and Cruelty," Lucifer at Large (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1937), pp 213, 214.

[16] Joseph Warren Beach, American Fiction: 1920 - 1940 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941), pp. 153,154.

[17] Such as Pelham Edgar who says, "We suspect that he does not always know the meaning of the long words he uses....", in "Four American Writers," Art of the Novel from 1700 to the Present Time (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 341.

[18] Beck, American Prefaces, p. 198.

[19] Cowley, Saturday Review of Literature, p. 14.

[20] Lewis, Men Without Art, p. 42.

[21] Beach, American Fiction, pp. 155-157. The quotation is from The Hamlet.

[22] Edgar, Art of the Novel, p. 341.

[23] Campbell, Sewanee Review, p. 310.

[24] Beck, American Prefaces, p. 198. The quotation is from As I Lay Dying.

[25] Duesberg, Synthèses, p. 349.

[26] Jacques Duesberg, "Le bruit et le tumulte de William Faulkner," Revue Générale (15 décembre 1939), p. 835.

[27] Ibid., p. 839.

[28] Magny, L'Age du roman américain, pp. 216, 217.

[29] M.E. Coindreau, "William Faulkner," Nouvelle Revue Française, 36 (juin 1931), p. 928.

[30] William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (New York: Random), p. 163.

[31] Faulkner's comments on music versus words would seem to imply support for Coindreau's contention:

> I would say that music is the easiest means in which to express....But since words are my talent, I must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better. That is, music would express better and simpler, but I prefer to use words, as I prefer to read rather than listen. I prefer silence to sound, and the image produced by words occurs in silence. That is, the thunder and the music of the prose take place in silence.

From Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, ed. Malcolm Cowley.

[32] Bernard DeVoto, "Witchcraft in Mississippi," Saturday Review of Literature, 15 (31 October 1936), p. 14.

[33] Stanley D. Woodworth, William Faulkner en France, 1931-1952 (Paris: M.J. Minard, 1959), p. 26.

[34] Ibid., pp. 28, 29.

[35] Beach, American Fiction, p. 154.

[36] Ibid., pp. 153-155. The quotation is from Light in August. It would seem that Beach and others who comment on Faulkner's grammar were very conservative in their standards.

[37] S.V. Benet, "Flem Snopes and His Kin," Saturday Review of Literature, 21 (6 April 1940), p. 7.

[38] Earle Birney, "Two William Faulkners," Canadian Forum, 18 (June 1938), p. 84.

[39] Cowley, Saturday Review of Literature, p. 14.

[40] DeVoto, Saturday Review of Literature, p. 4.

[41] McCole, Lucifer at Large, p. 212.

[42] Clifton Fadiman, "Faulkner, Extra-Special Double-Distilled," New Yorker, 12 (31 October 1936), p. 63.

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## CHAPTER SIX

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